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TREES TO PLANT

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Ash trees that have or will soon be removed need replacement and what to plant is becoming a common question. Trees are a long term investment. It is worth selecting a quality tree that is less likely to turn into a problem.

In a nutshell, a quality tree is considered to be one that has strong wood, few pest or other problems, and is not overplanted in an area.

I'm often asked for a list of fast growing trees to provide quick shade. However, fast growing trees tend to be lower quality due to soft or brittle wood. It is fast growth that can lead to weaker wood.

Slower growing trees tend to be better quality and typically provide benefits for more years with fewer problems. And people are often surprised at how fast supposedly slow growing trees grow when sited, planted, and cared for correctly.

While I will list a few trees to consider, there are too many good to great trees to list them all. Two resources to use are the Nebraska Forest Service at <https://nfs.unl.edu> and the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum at <https://plantnebraska.org>. Both have lists of trees for Nebraska.

After reviewing these, ask a local nursery or Nebraska Extension office about trees of interest.

A reputable nursery person has experience with growing trees in the area and can share which ones have been successful and which trees tend to have issues or fail to grow well.

Over the years, I've compiled a list of trees for our area. They are designated as good to great trees, okay to good trees, okay trees, and trees to avoid planting. Feel free to e-mail me for this list at kfeehan2@unl.edu.

When selecting trees, look for trees hardy to at least zone 5. Consider tree height and crown width. Select a tree that will fit your planting site. When possible, select a taller shade tree over a small ornamental tree for the greatest amount of shade.

There is a growing trend to plant shorter trees, especially after wind storms. If this trend continues, our communities will lose valuable shade canopy at a time when climate change makes it important to maintain this canopy.

Here are some shade trees to consider planting in our area. Check these trees out further. Make sure they have characteristics you like and you can live with any characteristics you might not like.

Oaks are great. Of the oaks, consider Chinkapin, English, red or bur oak. Maples are always popular. Quality maples include Norway maple and heat tolerant sugar maples. Other maples to consider are State Street or Miyabei maple, black maple and paperbark maple. They are untested here but should do well.

Of the elms, try one of the new Dutch Elm resistant hybrid elms. These include Jefferson, Prairie Expedition, and Princeton. Lacebark elm is a nice tree. Other hybrid elms to plant are Frontier, Triumph, Cathedral and Accolade.

Other trees I like are Ginkgo, Kentucky coffeetree, silver linden, Ohio buckeye, pecan, horse chestnut and shagbark hickory.

Trees to AVOID include ash, pin oak, silver maple, seed producing cottonwood, poplars, austrees, white birch and royal Pawlonia.

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Natural needle drop on evergreen trees is likely to show up soon. While evergreens remain green year round, they do not keep all of their needles forever. Most evergreens retain one to three year old needles. This is why the interior of the tree is bare of needles. Natural needle drop typically begins in September with the inner needles of trees suddenly and uniformly turning yellow from near the top of the tree to the bottom. These yellow needles are easily knocked off of branches by hand, wind or rainfall. Natural needle drop is most noticeable on white pines, creating concern for tree owners. But natural needed drop is just that; natural and not a concern for the tree. As a rule, pine trees typically hold needles for three years and spruce hold needles five to seven years. If the inner needles of an evergreen suddenly turn yellow at this time of year, it is most likely natural needle drop and is harmless.

We will soon be at the time when perennial broadleaf weed control is most effective with spot treatments of herbicide. Perennial broadleaf weeds are not grasses or sedges, and their roots survive winter for the plant to regrow next season. Dandelions, clover, violets, and chickweed are common examples. If herbicides are your choice of control for lawn weeds, fall applications work best at killing these weeds because more herbicide is moved into roots during fall. This is most effective if we wait until after a light frost to make the first application. Once night temperatures begin to fall into the 30s, plants initiate carbohydrate movement into roots. This increases the movement of herbicide into roots, which increases weed kill. Combination herbicides like Trimec are generally more effective in controlling perennial broadleaf weeds than products with only one active ingredients.

Asparagus and rhubarb are two common perennial vegetables grown in Nebraska. Being hardy perennials, they survive our winters and grow from year to year, and so questions about what to do with them in the fall are common. From the time harvest is finished in spring up until the first frost, asparagus and rhubarb are building food reserves to support next year's crop. Throughout the summer and well into fall, it is important to water during dry weather and control weeds that compete with moisture and nutrients. Now is not the time to fertilize asparagus or rhubarb. This is best done right after harvest. Wait to cut these plants back until after a hard frost. As long as the foliage is green, the plant is storing food in for next year's crop. After frost, the foliage can be removed, or left over winter to provide protection and collect snow for soil moisture. They should then be cut back next spring just before new growth begins.

Native bees are important pollinators, along with honeybees and other insects. Most native bees are solitary. Unlike social bees, they do not live in hives and are either stingless or very unlikely to sting. Some native bees are as small as a rice kernel and easy to overlook. But the value of native bees for pollination cannot be overlooked. One way to conserve native bees is to leave your garden a little trashy over winter; rather than cutting all plants to the ground. About 30 percent of native bees overwinter or nest in the soft or hollow centers of twigs or plant stems. The other 70 percent nest underground, mostly in untilled soil. This fall, leave the tops of plants with winter interest and others where feasible. Its fine to remove the tops of plants that had a severe disease this past season to reduce overwintering fungi, but leave 12 to 15 inches of plant stems to help conserve native bees overwintering within the stem.

As temperatures begin to cool, nuisance insects like spiders and lady beetles accidentally enter homes. If considering setting off an insect fogger to control indoor insects; think again. Over-the-counter foggers are rarely effective against common household insects; and if used incorrectly they can be dangerous. When a fogger is set off, the insecticide mist is released into the air. Eventually, the insecticide falls onto surfaces where children play, people sleep and food is prepared, such as countertops, floors, tables, chairs and beds; but rarely does the insecticide penetrate cracks and crevices where most insects hide. And, if the user fails to turn off the pilot light on a water heater or gas stove, insect foggers could cause explosions. Use weather stripping and caulking to reduce insect entry; and if needed, apply insecticide sprays around foundations outdoors; but do avoid the use of indoor foggers.