

Webster's defines an ornamental plant as one grown for its decorative effect. It's commonly accepted that gardeners grow most herbaceous flowers for their decorative effect. Flowers exhibit crisp colors, sweet scents, striking shapes and fascinating forms—all qualities that enrich ornamental value. Although we generally grow trees for their shade, many are grown simply for their ornamental worth. Such ornate qualities are displayed in numerous ways.

Sometimes a tree is described as a tree for all seasons. Translated literally, that means the tree has striking qualities during spring, summer, fall and winter. All trees, including ornamentals, provide some degree of shade during the heat of summer; however, most ornamental trees are grown for their showy flowers, interesting foliage or buds, attractive bark, beautiful branching patterns. Often ornamentals have attractive fruit or other qualities such as interesting shape, color and texture. Unlike shade trees, which are capable of reaching heights of sixty to seventy feet or more, most ornamental trees achieve mature heights of approximately fifteen to twenty-five feet.

I offer one bit of advice when it comes to selecting an ornamental tree. With so many varieties from which to choose, select only those capable of growing successfully in the USDA zone where it is to be planted. For us, living in Central Nebraska, that is Zone 5. To insure greater success, I frequently suggest one select trees capable of surviving in lower zones such as in Zone 4 or even in Zone 3.



Over the years, Rita and I have planted a number of ornamental trees in our landscape. Last summer a horrendous wind storm hit our yard destroying our beautiful ornamental redbud tree. One of my goals for this spring was to replace it, which I did just weeks ago. The redbud is rated for Zone 4 and is a beautiful spring flowering tree with striking heart-shaped leaves. Other ornamental trees we have growing in our landscape include flowering dogwood, kousa dogwood, star magnolia, saucer magnolia, Kwansan cherry, ornamental sumac, Japanese maple, prairie fire crab apple and white candle crab apple.

In addition to replanting the redbud, this year we added a new ornamental called *Chionanthus virginicus*—more commonly identified as a white fringe tree. I have

also heard of this tree titled, *Old Man's Beard*, a reference I'm convinced is due to its airy, drooping clusters of fringed, whiskery-white flowers. Our tree is presently blooming and as an added bonus, not only are these fringed flowers fascinating, they are also fragrant.



White fringe tree can be grown as a small multi-stemmed tree or as single-stemmed tree. At maturity the tree will reach heights of 15 to 20 feet with a spread of 10 to 15 feet. Now that ours is blooming, I anticipate these lovely fragrant flowers giving rise to clusters of olive-like fruits ripening to a dark navy blue in late summer. I'm quite sure these fruits will be devoured quickly by birds and other wildlife. The leaves of this tree are broad, long and spear-shaped. They are currently dark-green but destined to turn a bright yellow in the fall. Fringe tree is easy to grow and rated hardy for Zone 4. It performs well in either full sun or part shade. Claimed to be low maintenance, white fringe tree prefers average, moist, well-drained soil.

I have no doubt, ornamental trees decorate a landscape. Thus far, our new white fringe tree has exceeded my expectations. I'm quite certain this ornamental tree will become one for all seasons. Time will tell.