

Right Tree/Right Place



The tree on the left is too tall to have been planted under utility lines. The middle one is a species that grows too large for the small space available. There are many small trees that would have substituted well for these trees. The tree on the right was planted in a low part of a lawn that floods periodically. There are several deciduous trees that can tolerate occasional flooding, but few evergreens can.

Where You Place Your Tree Determines Its Success

Trees have different shapes, sizes, rates of growth, requirements for sun, shade, soil and moisture, etc. These characteristics help guide where you plant your tree on your property. They are summarized below and details are given for over 80 tree species in the document on this site titled "Right Tree Right Place Tree List." You can look up the tree that you are planting by searching the list by the tree's common name, e.g., tulip tree, sycamore, cherry, etc.

Space. Where you place your tree can be dictated by where you wish to put it. Are there overhead or buried utility lines? Is the site surrounded by streets, sidewalks, driveways, buildings or other trees? How tall and how wide will your tree be when mature? Envision it at full size when deciding where to plant.

Sun exposure. Some trees need several hours of shade every day. Others need full sun all day long. What kind of sun exposure will the place you have chosen to plant your tree provide?

Wind exposure. In a woodland setting, trees are protected from the force and moisture reducing effects of wind by the trees around them. When placing a tree on a lawn, in a park or other open site, look for features that can shelter the newly planted tree from wind or look for a more sheltered location.

Pests. Rodents, insects and deer can pose problems for young trees. The expanding deer population in Piedmont Virginia poses a special problem because they browse on young trees' tender branches and stems, eat their leaves and male deer damage young trees' bark by rubbing against it to remove the velvet from their antlers.

Growth rate. How long will it take for your tree to reach its full height? Slow growing species typically live longer than fast growing species.

Soil and moisture requirements. Some trees prefer moist soil, others dry soil and some can tolerate either kind. Test your soil quickly and easily to find out how good a match your site is for the tree you would like to plant (<http://www.soiltest.vt.edu/>).

Fruit/seed pods. Some trees drop fruit, seed pods or other materials and create maintenance issues if located over streets, sidewalks and driveways.

Views. Particularly on corner lots, avoid plantings that would obscure traffic signs and line of sight for motor vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Energy savings. Plant deciduous trees on the southeast side of the house for morning shade and on the southwest and west for afternoon shade. When deciduous trees lose their leaves in the fall, they let sunlight in to warm the house. Plant conifers on the north side to block winter winds.

Hardiness zone - what are the temperature extremes in which your tree can be expected to grow? Will the tree you want to grow succeed in Piedmont Virginia?

Lawns. Young trees are often planted on lawns, but turf grass roots hamper tree root growth. Grass roots are dense and occupy the same space where tree roots need to grow, outcompeting trees for water and nutrients and impeding tree growth. Removing turf around the new tree and replacing it with mulch reduces this effect (see the document titled "Tree Planting Guide" on this site for help with how to mulch a tree planted on a lawn.)

Look down. If planting a tree with a large root ball, call before you dig - dial 811 or visit va811.com - formerly "Miss Utility." Avoid damaging utility lines when you have to dig deep.

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Contact us at www.charlottesvilletreestewards.org - click on the "Contact" button on the main menu and leave us a note if you have any questions about planting a tree or if you would like to share with us your experience or photos of your newly planted tree.