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News Release

Time for Trees

Question: I need help with trees. After losing several beautiful old shade trees in the April and October storms, there is space in my landscape for new varieties. So here is my tree “wish list”: grow quickly, be drought tolerant, have seasonal interest, be native to this area, and oh, provide nectar and/or pollen for honey bees since my neighbor is a beekeeper. Can you suggest some trees that come close to meeting my wish list criteria?

Answer: You chose a good time to pose your question, for several reasons. And yes, there are species that will come close to meeting your needs although you’ll need to factor in soil type, moisture needs and how much sun/shade these plants require.

Fall is considered the best time to plant most trees and shrubs in north central Alabama (there are exceptions, of course). Fall planting allows for roots, arguably the most important part of a tree, to establish a healthy root system before encountering the stresses of summer heat, humidity and sporadic droughts.

In part due to our recent round of severe weather, organizations have partnered to create a list of tree species better able to survive high winds associated with these storms. Most of these trees are well suited to our climate and conditions and are easy to grow with few pests or diseases to bother them.

In addition, plant sales this time of year encourage the purchase and installation of trees, both ornamental and fruiting, woody shrubs, spring-blooming bulbs and other fall-planted/spring blooming perennials. One of the premier events supporting this philosophy is the Fall Plant Sale at Birmingham Botanical Gardens, held Oct. 22nd and 23rd, and open to the public.

Back to your question and wish list: keep in mind that trees are the ultimate gift to your children and grandchildren. A well-chosen tree, planted and maintained properly, will add structure to your landscape and value to your home. Well-placed trees can reduce cooling costs in summer and offer structural interest during winter months. Trees in particular are often the most expensive “green” components in our landscapes, and therefore should be chosen with care and consideration of the role they are intended to fulfill.

So, on to your list: keep in mind that not all of these suggestions will work in your situation or landscape. Conversely, don't be afraid to try something you haven't grown before. Wind resistant trees include Baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*)*, Mockernut Hickory (*Carya tomentosa*)*, Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*)*, and Fringetree or Grancy Graybeard (*Chionanthus virginicus*)*. Other wind resistant species include Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*), Inkberry holly (*Ilex glabra*), Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), Post oak (*Quercus stellata*), Black Tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*)** and Redbud (*Cercis canadensis***).

A quick review of these suggestions includes some that are moderate growers, drought tolerant or resistant once established, offer noteworthy flowers and/or good fall color and offer a "way station" for honey bees.

However, as a note to the 'rapid growth' criteria on your wish list, native tree species seem to hold up better during storm events if they have spreading branches, smaller leaf size, lower centers of gravity and are planted in groups. And while we want to fill in those gaps in our tree lines as quickly as possible, research has also indicated that slower growing trees generally are stronger and more wind resistant than many faster growing trees with weaker wood. So there's the trade-off: slower growing but generally stronger in high winds.

For more information about this topic please contact Sallie Lee, Urban Regional Extension Agent-Home Grounds, Gardens and Home Pests at the St. Clair County Extension Office at (205) 338-9416 or email leesall@aces.edu.

*Wind resistant and sold at Fall Plant Sale, Birmingham Botanical Gardens. For more info, visit www.bbgardens.org/fallplantsale.

**Wind resistant and good honey bee trees.



Black Tupelo (Nyssa sylvatica) provides fall color