

# Community Forestry Assistant



## Newsletter April 2008



Northwest  
Management, Inc.

### Tree Selection

Whether on Main Street, the local city park, or at home, trees are one of our most important landscape features. Of course, there are many benefits of trees—shade, beauty, windbreak, privacy, cleaner air, less noise, and higher property values to name a few. However, if the wrong tree is planted in the wrong place, a tree can become more of a liability than an asset. Considering the longevity of most trees, they will most likely outlive the planter. Therefore, the decision of which tree to plant in a given area becomes very important, not only to the planter, but to those who follow for years to come.

The first consideration of proper tree selection should be what conditions the tree needs to be successful. All trees have requirements including light, good soil, water, canopy and root space, and adaptability to temperature extremes. To obtain the maximum benefit from a tree, choose a species that will fulfill the desired function of its placement and is capable of growing in the conditions in which it is planted.

Do a site analysis before deciding upon a certain kind of tree. Be sure to determine if the planting area is shady or is in full sun and how much rainfall it will receive. Find out if the soil is well drained or if it is usually saturated with water. Additionally, if the soil is compacted, tree growth may be reduced because of the lack of oxygen in the root zone. The area above and below ground must be large enough to allow the tree to reach its mature height, spread, and trunk diameter without interfering with surrounding objects such as buildings, utilities, other trees, etc. This will help to avoid problems such as lifting sidewalks, damage to water or drainage pipes, overhead line interference, or even encroaching on neighbors.

Upon completion of the site analysis, attention can be given to the selection of a particular species of tree. Be sure to consider the overall size of the tree. The character of a tree's form will vary as much as differences in leaf shapes or bark texture.



Match the mature form of a species with the area in which it will be planted. For example, when planting a tree in a place with a narrow area for upward growth, a columnar form would be a good choice. Choose a tree with characteristics that match the need for each specific site. Some characteristics to consider are bark texture, attractiveness to birds or wildlife, fruit production, leaf shape, size and color, flowers, fall color, etc. Other plant characteristics, such as excessive leaf, fruit, or twig drop may preclude the use of certain trees adjacent to a sidewalk, patio, or parking lot. It is also important to think about future maintenance requirements a tree may have when selecting a tree for a certain site. Some trees may require more water than others, some may be prone to infestations of a particular insect, while others may require a more frequent pruning. It may be wise to avoid trees that will require constant maintenance program. Many cities prepare a list of trees that they feel are

acceptable for use along city streets. This list usually allows for enough diversification to avoid problems with a particular disease or insect while helping to prevent the planting of species which are not desirable in the community.

Once the species of tree to be planted has been chosen, it is time to select the actual plant at the nursery. To have success with a tree, it is important to start with a healthy plant. Look for a tree that displays vigorous growth at the nursery. It should have well formed leaves that do not display obvious signs of insects. It should have an even, well spaced branch structure and proper trunk taper. Foliage should be evenly distributed in the top 2/3 of the tree. Check the plant for any mechanical damage and reject one that has torn bark, broken branches, or other obvious damage. You want this tree to last a lifetime on your property, therefore, second-rate plants belong somewhere else.

**If you would like more information, please contact your local Idaho Department of Lands supported North Idaho Community Forestry Assistant, Tera King at Northwest Management, Inc. at 208-883-4488.**