

Avoid disappointment; plant the right tree in the right place

Faced with a droopy, drab or dying tree that you recently paid big bucks for at the nursery? Chances are the tree is struggling in a site that is ill-suited for its health, says an expert in community/forestry in Penn State's School of Forest Resources.

"Too many homeowners go down to the garden center and buy the first tree they see, or whatever is on sale," says Bill Elmendorf, instructor and urban and community forest program coordinator. "Homeowners should think in terms of how the tree will fit in the site and how it will look 10 to 20 years down the road."

Elmendorf says a lot of research into compatible tree species, local soils and municipal regulations can prevent major maintenance headaches or aesthetic disappointments. "If you choose the correct species for a particular site, the tree has less chance of dying and will mature to full growth faster," he says. "You also will save on maintenance over the life of the tree, as well as maintenance to sidewalks and curbs."

Elmendorf says understanding the planning site is the most important part of choosing a tree, especially to ensure a pleasing landscape. However, homeowners also should pay attention to what is below the ground, above the tree and near the site.

"You need to consider where storm drains, electric utilities and

gas lines are," Elmendorf warns. "Pay attention to the location of traffic and business signs and how far away the tree will be from the curb or sidewalk."

Analyzing a site for planting a tree requires just a few basic steps:

- **Temperature.** Know the temperature range for your area, particularly low temperatures. "Planting a tropical palm tree in Pennsylvania isn't a good idea," Elmendorf says.

"Most southern trees don't do well in northern climates. Tree species such as oak or poplar that normally thrive in northern states may not do well if they came from southern seed sources."

- **Moisture.** Homeowners should estimate the amount of rainfall in their area. If the tree is to be planted in an urban setting, ask how much water is available. "Most city trees are surrounded by concrete and asphalt and don't get much moisture unless someone's washing off the sidewalk," Elmendorf says.

- **Soil.** Most trees do well in neutral or slightly acidic soils. Trees such as red oaks, pin oaks and red maples planted in limestone-laden alkaline soils will experience nutrition problems. "This is a problem in urban areas because concrete is full of limestone, and asphalt roads usually are built on beds of crushed limestone," Elmendorf says.

- **Soil compaction.** In cities and residential developments, soils are very compacted, making it difficult, if not impossible, for trees to thrive. "Almost all soils in urban areas are compacted and may be nutritionally poor," Elmendorf says. "If it doesn't recede an inch in an hour, you'll have problems."

- **Space.** Elmendorf also recom-

ommends analyzing the growing space for trees, to make sure there is enough room for canopy and root growth. "Big trees need big space," he adds.

Elmendorf recommends consulting a reputable nursery or a qualified arborist before planting any trees.

Penn State Pointers ▶ Planting the Right Tree

When landscaping, you should consider how a tree suits a site and how it will look long after planting.

Factors in selecting the right tree include:

TEMPERATURE
Choose a tree that is suitable for the climate. A southern tree, or a tree grown from southern seed sources, usually will not do well in the northern climate.

MOISTURE
Estimate the amount of rainfall in your area. If planting in an urban area, ask about water restrictions. Also, a tree surrounded by concrete or asphalt often won't get much water.

SOIL COMPOSITION
Most trees do well in neutral or slightly acidic soils. Limestone in soils or in concrete sidewalks and roads affects nearby trees. Take special care preparing site in compacted soils.

DRAINAGE
A tree that gets too much water will be unhealthy. It is important that the soil around a tree drains properly and is not swampy or too wet. Note if there's water from runoff sources.

SPACE
Big trees need big space. Analyze the 'growing space' to make sure there's room for root and canopy growth. Consider how a tree may affect the house climate where planted.

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E Seal benefits home buyers, planet

You've found the perfect house. The kitchen, the master suite, the baths. The floor plan. They've all come together in one package (just the way you hoped).

Now you're looking hard at the details. "Is my house energy efficient?" "Does it have any features that make it healthier for me and my family?" And... "Will it enable us to do our share to protect the environment?"

You're not alone in asking these key questions. "Home buyers are becoming increasingly green, and their purchase decisions reflect this," said Tom Farkas, manager of residential utility programs for Edison Electric Institute, which represents electric utility companies across the country. "Protecting the environment has become another reason why home owners want to use energy efficiently."

To respond to the growing environmental concerns of a key, utility customer—home owners—EEl initiated the E Seal certification system for its member electric utilities. An electric utility home construction program that has earned the E Seal meets the highest criteria for energy and resource efficiency. Houses built

within the guidelines of this program will help you save money and protect the environment. Many electric utilities began encouraging home builders to build energy-efficient houses after the first energy crisis of the early '70s. These utility guidelines for home construction helped home owners to conserve energy and save money. Energy-efficient housing helped the utility to defer the need for more expensive power plants. That helps to keep the cost of electricity lower for everyone. It also reduces the utility's impact on the environment.

E Seal features national guidelines for efficiency in virtually every aspect of your home. It also addresses many environmental



concerns such as indoor air quality, water quality and conservation, and home-waste management.

Houses that are built within an E Seal-certified utility program will probably cost more than houses that don't offer their features. However, to keep them affordable, E Seal-certified utilities can offer the E Seal mortgage to qualifying buyers. This mortgage covers 100 percent of the energy-saving upgrades, and at preferential interest rates. Buyers won't need to put more money down, or pay more in private mortgage insurance. The E Seal mortgage means more eligible first-time buyers, and more home for the move-up buyer.

Call your electric utility company's residential marketing department and ask about their programs for new home buyers. It could help you protect your indoor environment, preserve natural resources, and save money.

Edison Electric Institute's E Seal certifies an electric utility home construction program meets the nation's highest criteria for energy-efficiency and environmental protection.

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Check Your Cooling I.Q.

To keep your home cool this summer, without putting a chill on your budget, you need to check your house's "Cooling I.Q." Whole-house efficiency is the key. By looking at your house as an energy system, you can get the most value and efficiency from your energy dollars. You'll also help protect the planet's environment, according to Edison Electric Institute, the association of shareholder-owned utility companies.

The following four steps can help you improve your home's cooling I.Q.

Step 1: Tighten your home's thermal envelope. This is a technical term that means everything that separates the inside from the outside: roof, windows, walls, doors, and floors over crawl spaces. Stopping or slowing down air leaks and drafts will save money. Adequate insulation and effective caulking and weatherstripping are essential. Storm windows and doors are cost-effective improvements. Many energy-saving products are also now available.

Step 2: Choose high-efficiency electric appliances. Cooling, heating and water heating are your house's largest energy users. Buy the most efficient system you can afford to do these tasks. Today's electric heat pumps are more efficient than even just a few years ago, returning \$3.00 for each \$1.00 spent on electricity. Some can now heat water at little extra cost. The newest geothermal systems use the ground for even lower-cost, environmentally-friendly cooling and heating. It pays to choose efficient appliances, including light bulbs, when you replace them.

Step 3: Control your energy use. Your house offers opportunities throughout to control energy costs. Even simple things like turning off lights when not needed, set-back or programmable thermostats are a smart way to control your home's temperature.

Step 4: Use your electric company as a resource. EEl member electric utility companies can give you free information and advice about getting more value from your electricity bill. For information, call your electric company's residential marketing department.

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