

# Expert: Rough-barked trees are best

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Connie Jo Discoe

McCOOK, Neb. -- A community forestry specialist with the Nebraska Forest Service strongly recommends planting trees -- fast-growing and slow-growing both -- with rough bark.

Amy Seiler, who conducted a tree workshop in McCook in late April -- perfect timing for tree planting -- told those at the workshop, "Smooth-barked trees are easily damaged, by hail, deer, cats, the sun."

Seiler told planters to be sure to remove the plastic wrap from a new tree -- used primarily for protection during shipping -- and inspect the stem for damage. A wound "is a forever wound," she said. A tree does not "heal" from a wound or even a pruning cut, she explained. (Lawn mower bumps or weed-whip slashes can eventually be fatal.) "A tree callouses over a wound ... like a permanent scab," she said.

Seiler recommends planting native and regionally-adapted trees. "Bur oak is meant to be here," she said, citing "Bur Oak Canyon," a stand of oaks southwest of Culbertson that is hundreds and hundreds of years old.

Her other recommendations: Plant only non-invasive species and high-quality plant stock with good root systems. She likes to see an assortment of fast-growing and slow-growing trees, and trees of different ages.

Plant at the right depth and in the right place -- considering the size of the full-grown tree. DO NOT plant tall trees under or near utility lines. "They're a pain for utility companies," Seiler said, a utility's pruning can be detrimental to a tree and, according to Nebraska Public Power, trees provide "a shortcut" for electricity between the power lines and the ground.

Seiler has nothing against fast-growing trees, although they don't take the time to develop the good root systems and defense mechanisms of slow-growing trees. They have their place by providing fast shade or a noise/sight hedge.

Seiler's list of fast-growing trees for Southwest Nebraska includes:

\* Freeman maple. As with any maple, she said, this tree is shallow-rooted and should not be over-watered or planted near driveways or patios. "They will pop the concrete," she said.

\* Catalpa. She said it just takes an attitude adjustment. "Think -- 'seeds are good'," she said, smiling. A seedless Catalpa is a genetic clone and is not good, she said.

\* Hackberry, "Chicagoland," "Prairie Pride" and "Magnifica." "This is a very good tree selection," Seiler said. "It grows in totally cruddy soil and ridiculous weather conditions."

\* Katsuratree. "Kasuratree is very tolerant of high pH soil. "North Platte likes Katsuratrees," Seiler said.

\* Honey locust. "Honey locust -- if it's seedless, go for it," Seiler said. And thornless. Thorns aren't good.

\* Cottonwood. "There is still a place for cottonwoods," Seiler said. "And a cottonwood is home to a ton of beneficial insects." She does not recommend a hybrid cottonwood.

\* American elms. She recommends Jefferson, Prairie Expedition and Princeton, all of which are Dutch elm disease-resistant. "The Prairie Expedition is adapted to horrendous climate conditions," Seiler said. The Princeton does not have a lot of limb breakage, and it does require pruning every year as a young tree, she said.

Hybrids and lesser-known elms are Accolade, Emerald Sunshine, Frontier, Patriot, Triumph and Rock Elm. "The Frontier has gorgeous fall colors and holds its leaves long. The Rock Elm is ridiculously hardy. It's a tough, tough, tough tree," Seiler said.

\* Osage orange. "Osage orange should do well here," she said, noting that they do pop up growing wild in road ditches. "Go only with a thornless variety," she said. "They do get to be huge trees. This is not a street tree."

\* American Sycamore. "It's worth a try here," Seiler said. "It's huge too, and has shallow roots."

Slow-growing trees live longer because they've developed a stronger root system and a defense to disease and insects.

\* Norway maples, "Parkway," "Paperbark," "Rocky Mountain Glow." "Paperbark is a tough little tree," Seiler said. It's drought resistant, although it doesn't like a lot of heat.

Sugar maples like cool weather and snow cover on their roots. Black maple is drought tolerant, and "Hot Wings" maple "is a fantastic tree, fast growing, and tolerant of cruddy soil," Seiler said.

A Shantung Norway maple "is something different to try," Seiler said.

\* Pecans. "Pecan trees look amazing in xeriscape landscapes," she said, but should be purchased only from a native or regional seed source.

\* Turkish filbert. "This is a cool tree," Seiler said, "an alternative to a linden."

\* Ginkgo, "Ginkgo Biloba Autumn Gold." "We should be using more ginkgo," Seiler said. "It's very slow growing, and was J. Sterling Morton's favorite tree."

\* Kentucky coffeetree. "Kentucky coffeetree is the 'ugly duckling' of trees," Seiler laughed. "It starts out really ugly, but grows into an insanely elegant, graceful tree." It has no insect or disease issues, she said.

\* Oaks. "We should be growing oaks here," Seiler said, citing "Swamp White Oak," "Heritage Oak," "Bur Oak," "English Oak" and "Shumard Oak." "Chinkapin oaks -- we need a bunch of these in our towns," Seiler said. "They are super tolerant of all pH soils."

\* Linden. "We need more American linden and less little leaf linden," Seiler said. The American linden has a more horizontal branching structure. Lindens are great habitat for bees and pollinators, she said.

## GRASS

"Trees and turf don't get along," Seiler said; bluegrass takes water and nutrients from trees.

Face it. The reality is, Seiler said, "We don't have water. We have to conserve water."

She continued, "Embrace our sense of place," and grow buffalo grass, blue grama and little bluestem grasses. And realize, she said, that large tree canopies help reduce evaporation off of lawns.

## WATERING

Overwatering can be just as bad as underwatering.

Too much water: Creates maintenance and tree health issues, and starves the roots of oxygen.

Too little water: Stunts growth and makes the tree unable to fight off insect pests and disease. The tree will dehydrate and may not have the ability to recover.

Water in the right place: Water does not move laterally in the soil, gravity pulls it down, Seiler said.

The average tree needs 5-10 gallons of water per inch of trunk diameter every 7-10 days. Amounts will vary depending upon species of tree (see directions that came with the tree or research the tree species); soil type (sandy to heavy clay?); soil compaction and how quickly water moves through the pores; and where the tree is planted (in full sun or at the mercy of the winds).

Remember that most water-absorbing roots lie within the top 10-24 inches of soil.

Also remember that, in the spring, a young tree needs moisture around its root ball. "Root tips need to be constantly seeking for water," Seiler said. She warned, "Don't let a tree dry out, but do not overwater it." Overwatering starves the roots of oxygen.

## OTHER TIDBITS OF INTEREST

- \* Be mindful of structures close to tree plantings. The sun will reflect off of a bright white house/building and make the atmosphere warmer for a nearby tree.
- \* If a "stump sprout" is growing from the root, let it grow. If it's coming from the tree stem, it has a poor attachment and won't grow on its own.
- \* Parking areas near trees will compact the soil, hindering the movement of oxygen to tree roots.
- \* It is very important to keep lawn mowers and weed whips away from tree trunks. Damage is permanent.
- \* If a tree is in decline and the homeowner knows it, an insurance company may not cover damages caused by it.
- \* Prune outside the branch protection zone (branch) and make a prune cut a perfect circle, not an oval. The callous over a wound should look like a doughnut, which means that cuts should be made only on young branches. If the branch is too large, it takes too long to callous over and disease and insects will find their way into the tree.
 

Some pruning projects will take more than one year as they are too extensive and too stressful to the
- \* tree to be completed in one year. Never remove more than 20-25 percent of a tree's foliage in one pruning. Unless it's absolutely necessary, it's best not to prune at the same time as planting.
- \* Pruning is an art, and it takes years to learn how trees respond to pruning techniques. "There is no pure science to pruning," Seiler said.
- \* Orchardists want one central leader (stem) and well-attached scaffold branches, and interior sunlight to help fruit ripen.
 

Young trees should be staked, "but not super tight," Seiler said. "You want the tree to be able to move
- \* with the wind to grow stronger." A tree should be staked for a year or until it is established (the tree and root ball don't move when the tree is moved back and forth gently.)
- \* Mulch should be spread 1-2 inches away from the trunk and to the drip-line of a tree. Mulch helps preserve moisture and prevents weeds from encroaching on the new, young tree.

- \* Don't fall in love with any one species or genus of a tree, and then overplant. "Diversity, diversity, diversity," Seiler said, in types of trees and in ages of trees.
- \* Seiler said, "If you need a reminder of how to plant and care for trees, take a walk along the river, and take hints from how nature planned its landscape."

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