

## ReTree Nebraska's top 15 trees

**SARAH  
BROWNING**  
HORTICULTURIST



MAY 09, 2015 10:30 PM • BY [KATHRYN CATES MOORE](#) | [LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR](#)

Considering all the benefits that trees provide, particularly in the windswept Great Plains, why not plant a new tree in your landscape this spring? Trees provide us with cleaner, cooler air, they help reduce home heating and cooling costs, and they can increase your property value. Urban trees reduce noise levels by

absorbing sound waves in their canopies, as well as trapping lung-damaging dust, ash, pollen and smoke. Research has shown that well-maintained green spaces reduce human stress levels and increase business value, with customers being willing to pay as much as 10 percent more for certain goods and services if businesses are located on tree-lined streets.

The Nebraska Forest Service's ReTree Nebraska program is a 10-year initiative that works in partnership with people across Nebraska, to achieve the goal of planting 1 million new trees by 2017.

This year the program features 15 trees for 2015. These trees are well adapted to Nebraska's extreme growing conditions and have great ornamental characteristics. So if you're considering planting a new tree this spring, you might find the perfect tree among this list of ReTree's 15 for 2015.

### Large deciduous trees

Let's look first at large, deciduous trees that perform well throughout Nebraska

\* **Baldcypress** is an unusual tree, a deciduous conifer, that loses all its needles each fall and regrows new needles each spring. It has feathery, sage green foliage in summer turning cinnamon-colored in fall. It develops a strong central leader form, giving trees a pyramidal shape and making them exceptionally wind firm. Baldcypress tolerates wet or dry soils, but may show some iron chlorosis in high pH soils.

\* **Northern Catalpa** is a tropical-looking tree with large heart-shaped leaves and clusters of attractive white orchidlike flowers in early summer. Flowers are followed by long, 8- to 20-inch, beanlike seed pods. Trees grow quickly, developing a rounded open crown. Catalpa is very adaptable to varying soil types, withstands extremely hot, dry environments, and is easy to transplant.

\* **Kentucky Coffeetree** is an amazingly adaptable native tree with rich bluish-green foliage that turns yellow in fall, rugged branches providing a beautiful winter outline, and handsome bark with scaly ridges. Trees develop a narrow, oval crown. It's one of the last trees to leaf out in spring. Female trees produce leathery seed pods, but seedless male selections are available, such as "Prairie Titan" and "Stately Manor." Kentucky coffeetree is adaptable to a

wide range of soil conditions.

In recent years, **American Elm** hybrids, *Ulmus* sp., have been developed with good resistance to Dutch Elm disease, including "Valley Forge" and "New Harmony." Elms are tough trees that tolerate drought, cold, ice, salt and air pollution. They transplant easily, having a shallow, fibrous root system. "Valley Forge" has the classic vase shape of American elm, while "New Harmony" is broadly vase-shaped.

\* **Hackberry** is the newest addition for 2015. It's a tough, reliable tree with distinctive warty bark and an arching branch habit. They are large trees, reaching 50 feet in height with a similar canopy spread. Their foliage is the primary food source for hackberry emperor butterfly larvae, and their small berrylike fruits are loved by birds.

Three species of **maple** recommended for Nebraska include sugar, black and bigtooth maple. (*Acer saccharum*, *A. nigrum* and *A. grandidentatum*) Sugar maple is a beautiful tree that should be planted more on favorable sites throughout eastern Nebraska. It has nice fall color and attractive chalky bark. Suitable cultivars include "Fall Fiesta," "Green Mountain," "Legacy," "Table Rock" and the drought-tolerant variety Caddo. Black maple is very similar to sugar maple and should be sited accordingly. Bigtooth maple is a Rocky Mountain variant that is a better choice for western Nebraska.

\* **Chinkapin Oak** is very well adapted to Nebraska's alkaline soils. Chestnutlike leaves are a lustrous dark green in summer, turning yellow or orange-brown in fall. Trees develop an open, rounded crown when young and have a thinner canopy than most oaks, making it easier to grow grass underneath. A tough, adaptable tree that is native to southeastern Nebraska and should be planted more. They are also very tolerant of deer feeding.

\* **Bur Oak** is one of the best native trees for Nebraska. With large, lustrous, deep-green leaves and grayish, flaky bark that develops into rugged ridged trunks, it is a very handsome tree. Also known as mossycup oak due to the deep caps that enclose more than half the acorn, bur oak tolerates drought, wind and extreme cold. It is also adaptable to many soil types, including sand and dry clay, and is more tolerant of city conditions than other oaks. But give it enough space to grow. Bur oaks are typically wider at maturity than they are tall. Easily reaching 50-60 feet in height and 50-70 feet in width.

\* **English Oak**, also known as truffle oak, is another large tree that can reach 50-60 feet in height, with 40-50 feet spread. Grows best in well-drained soil and is tolerant of high pH or alkaline soil.

\* **American Sycamore** is a beautiful tree with red to gray brown bark. As trees age, their bark flakes away leaving mottled white to cream bark in the upper branches earning these trees the nickname "ghost of the forest." Trees are large, 80 feet in height with a 50-foot wide canopy, so make sure you have room. American sycamore performs best in eastern Nebraska. A tough tree that tolerates high pH and/or wet soil, in its native range, sycamore is found growing in moist bottomlands and along rivers and streams.

## Medium to small deciduous trees

\* **Shantung Maple** is a great, small, ornamental maple from Asia with small star-shaped leaves that are deep green in summer and turn yellow in fall. It's also known as purpleblow maple, due to the reddish-purple color of the new foliage, purple fruits and bark that is often tinged with purple when young. Trees develop a rounded crown. Shantung maple is

drought tolerant and resistant to leaf scorch.

\* **Miyabe Maple** is a nice medium-sized tree with a graceful outline. Deeply lobed leaves stay dark green into October, then fall rapidly. Miyabe maple has a medium to fast growth rate, with an upright oval to rounded crown. It does best in moist, well-drained soils, but can tolerate some dryness.

\* **Gambel Oak** a nice medium-sized tree reaching 25-35 feet in height, with a similar spread. It has glossy green foliage, turning golden yellow in fall. It tolerates dry conditions and high pH soil.

\* **Tree lilac** is a tough, but ornamental small tree that can be used as a specimen tree or in group plantings and features dark green foliage that is ignored by most insect pests, with large clusters of creamy white flowers in early summer. Trees may be either single or multistemmed and will reach approximately 25 feet in height, with a 15-25 foot spread. "Ivory Silk" Japanese tree lilac is a common cultivar. "Copper Curls" Pekin lilac has very showy coppery-orange exfoliating bark.

## Evergreen trees

\* **Concolor fir**, also known as white fir, has blue-green, upswept needles. Needles have a rounded tip, making the foliage soft to the touch, when compared to the prickly needles of spruces. Trees develop a pyramidal or conical shape and are most attractive when allowed to branch to the base. Growth is medium to slow. Concolor is the best fir for the Midwest, easily withstanding Nebraska's summer heat and winter cold. Height 30-50 feet plus, width 15-30 feet. Hardy in zones 4a-7.

\* **Black Hills Spruce** has short, dark green needles, developing an upright growth habit, and is a nice alternative to blue spruce. It likes to be kept moist, but is an extremely hardy tree that tolerates tough sites well, including wind, heat, cold and drought. Black Hills Spruce transplants easily and has a slow growth rate. It is useful as a specimen tree, in mass plantings or in a windbreak. Height 20-40 feet, width 20 feet. Hardy in zones 2-6.

\* **Ponderosa Pine** is native to western Nebraska but is a good evergreen choice for the entire state. It's a tough tree that prefers deep, moist, well-drained loam soil, but is very tolerant of drought and high pH soil. It also has good salt tolerance. Trees are pyramidal when young, but their canopy broadens with age. Height 65 feet or more.

For more information on ReTree Nebraska or to view pictures of these trees, go to its website at [retreenebraska.unl.edu](http://retreenebraska.unl.edu).