

**For release mid-April**  
**SIMPLY TREES** monthly column  
from Nebraska Forest Service  
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## Spring-flowering Trees

SIMPLY TREES for April 2015 by Karma Larsen, Nebraska Forest Service

In just a few weeks, twigs now invisible against the winter background will suddenly fill their expanse with as much color and bloom as a good-sized flowerbed. We barely notice them now, but their day is coming.

In Nebraska, winter forces a certain amount of patience (and simultaneously impatience) on us. If the vegetable gardener's hope and desire is for that first tomato, the flower-lovers among us wait as anxiously for the first blossoms. And one of the most dramatic and longest-lasting ways get early color is to plant spring-flowering trees.

It's hard to think of a garden with no trees. To a large extent, trees can determine the climate of the yard, certainly the microclimate of the area directly around them. They provide shade and protection from wind, they act as walls and ceilings to enclose outdoor "rooms." They provide interest of many kinds, appealing to all the senses by their fragrance, fruit, texture, even sound. Perhaps best of all, they are constantly changing. From buds to foliage to bark, they're a continuously visible but changing part of the landscape.

We use them to frame some views, block out others. More often than not, the trees themselves are the focal point—whether they're being seen from the yard or from inside the house. Wildlife depend on them for food and shelter and add further interest.

Our desires for maximum efficiency make us think in terms of seasonal interest, wanting "returns" for as much of the year as possible. And in fact, spring-flowering trees are rarely one-stop shows. Their blossoms often give way to fruit or colorful foliage later in the year, and many of them also have unusual and attractive bark.

Most spring-flowering trees are good understory trees, thriving in the protection of the canopy provided by larger trees. The pale colors of their blossoms can be especially noticeable in the foreground of large evergreens. And the mulched area under these small trees can be a good place to plant spring bulbs.

So take a good look at your landscape and imagine what it might look like in coming years with these or other spring-bloomers. Most of them will grow to about 20 feet in height and spread, with white blossoms (unless otherwise noted) sometime between April and June.

Chokecherry, *Prunus virginiana*

Corneliancherry, pagoda or kousa dogwood, *Cornus* species, white to yellow to green

Crabapple, *Malus* species, white and pink

Fringetree, *Chionanthus*

Magnolia, white and pink

Redbud, *Cercis canadensis*, purplish pink

Serviceberry, *Amelanchier*

Shantung maple, *Acer truncatum*, yellow

Smoketree, *Cotinus obovatus*, yellowish

Tree lilac, *Syringa reticulata*

(Callery or Bradford pear, once planted for its spring display, is now labelled invasive due to its rapid spread and tendency to form dense thickets that out-compete native and other plants.)