

Trees in the Landscape

The Value of Trees

Property values of effectively landscaped homes are 5-20% higher than comparable homes with 'average' landscape. The economic benefits of trees can be both direct and indirect. Direct economic benefits are usually associated with energy costs.

Trees provide shade and cover for paved surfaces, reducing reflected heat. Street trees improve the curb appeal of a neighborhood.

Deciduous trees placed on the south and west sides of homes provide shade in the summer and can lower air conditioning by 10-15%. In the winter, the sun's rays penetrate to warm the home.

- Trees used as screens provide privacy and block unpleasant views.
- Flowering trees add accents and beauty.
- Fruit trees provide a food source for people.
- Trees provide habitat for wildlife.
- Air quality can be improved through the use of trees.

Trees are investments that have the potential to benefit homeowners and communities. Trees that are chosen wisely, cared for appropriately and managed effectively will be enjoyed by generations.

Trees can be planted almost any time in the low desert - avoiding the blistering summer heat is encouraged. October is a great month to plant trees. When planted at this time they have the entire winter to establish an extensive root system before the blast of heat next summer. Begin by.....

1) Selection - choose the appropriate tree. Trees that are adapted to our soils and climate are logical choices when considering tree varieties. Our soils are alkaline with a high pH and our water is salty. Combined with the brutal summer heat and winter frosts these conditions limit choices to trees that have evolved in similar conditions. The desert-adapted trees will remain healthy and live longer than ornamental varieties that continually are exposed to the stresses of our environment. Dozens of choices are available depending on the location you have in mind.

2) Planting - plant your tree in the right place and allow for mature size. Refer to new planting standards on planting, staking, "non-pruning" (see reference below). The new standards state dig a hole NO deeper than the container, but loosen the soil in a large area of the planting site. Do NOT add amendments to the back fill. Remove the original nursery stake (if there is one). If your tree requires staking, use two sturdy poles placed outside the area of the root ball. Secure the trunk loosely, allowing the tree to move a bit in the wind. The movement will produce strong trunk tissue. You should be able to remove the stakes within one growing season.

3) Tree Care - Pruning - none the first year, remove no more than 25% of the foliage per year. Every leaf is a food factory for the tree. Allow foliage to remain on newly planted trees - the leaves will produce sugars that the tree uses to produce roots and foliage. Leave tiny branches along the trunk for the first year to two. They direct nutrients to the trunk tissues, strengthening them and even shading the trunk, reducing the risk of sunburn.

4) Water - how much? how often? How deep? Water to a depth of three feet allowing the soil to dry a bit between applications. Newly planted trees will require more frequent irrigation until they are established. Mature trees benefit from deep (up to 3'), infrequent watering,

approximately every two weeks in the summer. As your trees grow, be sure to move the emitters away from the trunk out to the drip line. The roots of most trees extend out to as much as four times the diameter of the canopy. Feeder roots are usually located within the top 12" of soil. For watering schedules visit <http://www.ci.gilbert.az.us/water/landscapetips.htm> . Fertilizer - desert legumes don't need it, less is better for others. Nitrogen is the element trees need most. This is the first number on the fertilizer bag. Ammonium sulfate is a good all-purpose product.

Resist the temptation to plant trees in turf areas. Turf areas create maintenance challenges due to the competing physical needs. Trees struggle to tolerate the shallow frequent watering necessary to keep turf attractive. Lawn is periodically aerated or dethatched or verticut. This damages the tiny feeder roots of trees that grow in the top layer of soil. It is these feeder roots that absorb most of the nutrients. Damaging them can have an impact on the tree. Also, as trees mature they generate shade that inhibits the growth of the turf.

Trees that tolerate lawn planting (generally)

Mesquites (all species)
Sweet Acacia
Desert Willow
Shoestring Acacia
Cat Claw Acacia

Trees that do not tolerate planting in lawns

Blue Palo Verde
Sonoran Palo Verde
Foothill Palo Verde
Mulga (Acacia aneura)
Ironwood
Texas Ebony

Refer to:

AZ1022 - Planting Trees and Shrubs <http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/az1022.pdf>

Guide to Arizona Desert Shade Trees - FREE from most nurseries and U of A Cooperative Extension Office, 4341 E. Broadway, Phoenix.

Plants for the Desert Southwest - FREE color brochure available at most nurseries and UA Extension Office. <http://www.amwua.org/xscp-brochures.htm>

Benefits of Trees, Tree Values - International Society of Arboriculture bulletins

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the next best time is now." Ron Romatzke, Arizona State Land Department

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