

## Going Out on a Limb

At this time of year many of us are sharing space with a tree inside our house—a Christmas tree. I would like you to consider what trees mean to us and what they can do for us. I would strongly urge you to consider adding them to your landscape. I recommend this for not just your personal health, but for the benefit of the whole earth.

Trees are vitally important to our health and the health of our planet. We are in a crisis of huge proportions with losing square miles of the rain forests in the Amazon and from clearing of trees for development in cities near and far. Destruction of trees from pollution and ravaging forest fires also take their toll.

Trees contribute to the very air that we breathe. They control storm water runoff and filter our drinking water. Sun light is filtered and air temperatures are cooled by their leaves. Trees provide fruits, nuts, syrups and medicinal ingredients for not only our population but host wild life, birds and insects that are vital to our planet's function. They also make us feel good. Shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing is a Japanese practice immersing yourself in the beauty, sounds and tranquility of the woods. Worldwide, this practice is being recognized as important for reducing stress and increasing connection to our natural, un-wired, world. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen. Trees make a difference in our world and so can you!

There are many organizations globally and domestically working to restore and expand the Earth's tree canopy. The best part is there is so much you can do to make a big difference right in your own back yard. You can plant native varieties in your landscape and protect trees from destruction in your community. Here are some tips for the best success:

1. Choose the right tree. Choose a variety suited to your climate (native species) and your site. Factors to consider are your soil type, amount of moisture and light. Also consider size when planting under overhead wires or near a structure. Master Gardeners at the Garden Hotline can help you choose.
2. Select a healthy specimen. There should be no signs of major wounding, root death or girdling (roots encircling the trunk). Check for underground utilities by calling the 811 call center to mark any unseen pipes and wires. Be certain the root flare (the thickening of trunk just above the root ball) is above the ground. Please note that many trees are planted too deeply and this hinders their viability. Dig the hole only as deep as the root ball. (The root ball should rest on firm soil). Refill the hole with the native soil. Amendments are not needed. The soil refilled over the roots should be tamped firmly to prevent air pockets. Make sure the trunk is straight from several vantage points.
3. Tend your sapling. Most trees require 2 to 3 years to become established. Mulch the roots. The ideal formula is 3-3-3. Three inches away from the trunk, 3 inches high and 3 feet out from the root flare. The mulch retains moisture and delivers nutrients to the soil. It also prevents damage to the trunk from mowers damaging the protective bark. Staking is only recommended if the root ball is small and you are in a windy area. Be cautious to allow the trunk to sway a bit to aid in trunk strength. Water the sapling regularly.

I'm going out on a limb to suggest that you resolve to start the new year out on the right foot. Plant a tree!