

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER
Tip of the Week
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CHOOSING and PLANTING SHADE TREES

Add comfort and value to your property with a few well-placed trees. Trees will shade the house or outdoor living areas especially with plantings on the southern and western sides. Tree sizes can range from 12 to 120 feet. Be sure to choose the correct height for the right place before you plant. If the right size is chosen to begin with, you won't "top off", or drastically delimb a tree, which opens it to infection and stress, greatly shortens the tree's life span, and usually makes it "really ugly." Consider not only the height the tree will mature to but also the width and "drip line" before placement.

Most trees are deciduous (loosing leaves in the fall) or evergreen (usually keeping their leaves). Think also of maintenance with raking, clean up, and fertilizing before planting.

Native and adapted trees are disease and insect resistance and heat and drought tolerant. Short height native and adapted trees will range from 12 to 25 feet high; medium height will grow from 40-60 feet tall; large will grow from 80-120 feet tall.

If you are starting with a blank slate, plant trees first in the landscape because they take longer to grow and establish. Fall to early spring are the best times to plant trees. This gives the trees months of root growth before the harsh Texas summer.

When planting, dig the hole 2-3 times the diameter of the root ball and only as deep as the tree was in the pot. Place the tree in the hole, backfill, and firm the soil around the tree leaving a small moat around the tree for a water channel. Water about 3 times a week gradually backing off to once a week. Remember to water even in the winter. Never let a new tree completely dry out until established...about 3 years.

Consider the growth rate of a tree and be patient! A fast growing shade tree is usually more short-lived than a steady grower, sometimes by 30-50 years. Why plant and care for a tree, and in 15 years have to cut it down and begin over again? So choose carefully before planting those trees.

For a list of trees or if you have any questions about gardening in Central Texas, contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com