

Selecting Trees to Plant in Illinois

Why Plant Trees?

From providing oxygen to reducing heating and cooling costs, trees in the home landscape have a lot of benefits. Home values increase when surrounded by mature shade trees. Homeowners benefit from long-term energy savings. In the winter, the bare branches of trees allow sunshine to warm the home.

Two trees shading the west side of a home from the afternoon summer sun can reduce summer cooling costs by 30%.

A big benefit for human health is a tree's ability reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by collecting and storing carbon as they grow and mature. Shade trees also absorb water and hold soil in place, two benefits during severe weather conditions such as floods. Trees also provide food and shelter for insects, birds, squirrels, and more wildlife.

Selecting a Tree

Trees are a long-term investment so do your research and make a suitable list of tree species. Many tree species do well throughout Illinois' hardiness zones.

Base selections on existing site conditions and tree characteristics suitable for the planting location. Pay attention to soil conditions, and wind and sun exposure. Recognize the tree's mature size, growth habit, multi-seasonal features and resistance to pest and disease.

Purchasing a Tree

- Inspect trees carefully before purchasing them.
- Make sure roots are NOT exposed.
- Inspect the trunk for damage, such as cankers.
- Be sure the container or root ball is the appropriate size compared to size of tree canopy.
- Guarantee that trees have been watered on a regular basis.



American elm cultivar

Trees to Plant in Fall

Kentucky coffee tree (*Gymnocladus dioica*): This Illinois native grows 60- to 75-foot tall and prefers full sun and moist, well-drained soils. It has fragrant, white flowers in the spring and persistent fruit pods. Pods can be messy, so consider a male cultivar. There are no serious pest problems and the Kentucky Coffee tree is adaptable to urban conditions, tolerating drought and pollution.

American elm 'New Harmony' (*Ulmus americana* 'New Harmony'): American elm 'New Harmony': Illinois native when cultivar is recommended. This cultivar or another resistant cultivar, should be planted due to risk of Dutch elm disease. This tree grows up to 40-foot tall and prefers full sun and moist, well-drained soil. It will tolerate a range in soil pH and is wind and heat tolerant. It features a picturesque vase shape and has a good yellow fall color.

Downy serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*): This 10- to 30-foot tall Illinois native needs little maintenance and is best transplanted balled and burlapped. It features smooth gray bark, excellent fall color, and slightly fragrant white flowers in mid-spring. Best placement is in full- to part-sun and moist to dry conditions with well-drained soil.

Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*): This Illinois native grows 15 to 30 feet in height and prefers part sun and rich, moist, well-drained soils. Pink blossoms occur in mid-spring before leaves appear. Seedpods can persist through winter. This tree is naturally short-lived. If dieback occurs, cutting it to the ground encourages sucker growth than can become a substantially-sized tree.

White Pine (*Pinus strobus*): One of our Illinois natives, white pine is quite hardy (Zone 3) with a youthful pyramidal habit. White pine is a large pine growing upwards of fifty feet or more in a good setting. As a mature pine, horizontal branching makes it stand out compared to other pines.

Limber pine (*Pinus flexilis*): This 30- to 50-foot-tall evergreen tree prefers full- to part-sun and moist, well-drained soils. This long-lived species works well as a specimen tree. It is adaptable to dry soils, windy sites and is more tolerant to salt spray than most pines.

Serbian spruce (*Picea omorika*): This evergreen grows 50 to 60 feet high and prefers deep, rich, moist, well drained soils. It tolerates part-shade and urban conditions, except for pollution. It serves as an excellent specimen tree, with dark green needles and contrasting white on the underside.

Trees to Plant in Spring

These trees can be difficult and slow to establish so they should be planted in the spring.

- Eastern or Canadian Hemlock, *Tsuga canadensis*
- White Willow, *Salix alba*
- River birch, *Betula nigra*
- White oak, *Quercus alba*
- Baldcypress, *Taxodium distichum*
- Ginkgo, *Ginkgo biloba*
- Sweetgum, *Liquidambar styraciflua*
- Magnolia, *Magnolia spp.*
- American hophornbeam, *Ostrya virginiana*
- American hornbeam, *Carpinus caroliniana*



Redbud, *Cercis canadensis*



White Pine, *Pinus strobus*

MORE INFORMATION



web.extension.illinois.edu/treeselector

AUTHORS

University of Illinois Extension Horticulture Educators

Nancy Kreith, kreith@illinois.edu, (708) 679-6889

Richard Hentschel, hentsche@illinois.edu, (630) 584-6166