

Ornamental Trees for North Florida ¹

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Trees are an indispensable part of the landscape. They give a home, street, or commercial site individuality, beauty, and tranquillity. Because of their long life, trees give the surroundings a sense of permanence and stability.

Trees are vital in combating environmental pollution. They help keep the air supply fresh by trapping and filtering dust, removing carbon dioxide, and at the same time releasing oxygen. Trees reduce noise pollution by acting as barriers to sound, lower temperatures by shading and through evaporation of water from their leaves, and reduce soil erosion. Trees can camouflage harsh scenery such as city dumps, auto graveyards, and industrial sites. Furthermore, trees beautify our gardens, streets, and parks and please our senses with interesting shapes, patterns, colors, scents, and seasonal changes. Every homesite should include several ornamental trees.

Selection of a Tree

Tree selection is mainly a question of personal preference. However, the species should be well adapted to the site and satisfy the purpose for which it is intended. In Florida, the number and variety of trees are so great that the choice is not always simple.

Table 1 lists information about desirable trees for north Florida. Trees listed are some of the best choices for home landscaping, and all have proven suitable for planting in north Florida. No attempt has been made to include all trees that can be grown in north Florida.

Planting Trees

Because of better developed and more compact root systems, nursery-grown trees are easier to transplant and grow more successfully than those taken from the woods. It is impractical when moving wild plants to dig and move more than a small portion of the root system, and without an adequate root system the tree may die after transplanting. The best place to purchase a tree is from a reputable nursery. Container-grown trees can be planted any time of the year. The nursery will be able to provide information on where and how to plant the tree selected.

Follow the steps below when planting a tree:

1. Have a nursery salesperson cut the container so that the tree can be easily removed.
2. Make the hole two to three times as wide as the container the tree is in.

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3. Make the hole no deeper than the height of the root ball.
4. Gently place the tree straight in the hole and be sure that the top of the root ball is not deeper than the existing landscape soil surface. Fill around the ball with soil and gently firm the soil. Water thoroughly while planting to remove any air pockets.
5. Form a basin around the edge of the root ball with a soil ridge 3-6 inches high to facilitate watering.
6. Mulch with a 2- to 3-inch layer of organic material to buffer soil temperature, conserve moisture, and reduce weed competition.
7. If needed, support the tree by staking or guying.
8. Water the tree daily for 1-2 months, then 3 times a week for 2 months, then weekly until established.
9. Fertilize 4 to 6 weeks after planting with a slow-release on the surface of the root ball and the backfill soil.

Fertilizing

Fertilization is usually desirable when we are trying to get newly planted trees established. We normally want the new tree to get off to a quick start and grow rapidly so that it will fill the planted area. When this is the case, fertilize about 4 to 6 weeks after planting and then 2 to 3 times per year for the following 3 years. Two of the annual applications are normally scheduled around February and October for south Florida, and March and September for north Florida. A third application can be made during the summer. Once trees are established (3 to 5 years after transplanting), they will not need additional fertilizer if they are growing in a landscape where turf and shrubs are fertilized.

A complete fertilizer with a ratio of approximately 3:1:2 or 3:1:3 (e.g. 12-4-8 or 15-5-15) is generally recommended. Similar analysis fertilizers such as 16-4-8 (4:1:2) can also be used.

Fertilizers that are slow release, controlled release, sulfur coated or with nitrogen as isobutylidene diurea or ureaformaldehyde have extended release periods compared to fertilizers that are readily water soluble. Thirty to fifty percent of the nitrogen should be water insoluble or slow release so that plant roots can absorb the nitrogen over a long period of time. A fertilizer containing thirty to fifty percent slow-release potassium should be used in south Florida or where soil potassium is frequently inadequate.

The amount of fertilizer to apply to trees can be determined by calculating the area under the trees and then applying fertilizer at the rate of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet of area.

Fertilizer placement in relation to the tree root zone is very important. Fertilizer should be applied to the surface of the mulched and unmulched areas around a tree out to a distance no more than one and a half to two times the canopy diameter. If the turf was fertilized within the two preceding weeks, do not apply additional fertilizer to the turf area around the tree.

Table 1. Ornamental Trees for North Florida

Common Name Scientific Name	Type of tree ¹	Height	Flower color Flower season	Soil Adaptability ²	Salt spray tol. ³	How Trees Are Used								
						Accent or Specimen	Border planting	Framing	Patio	Roadside & Street	Seaside	Shade		
American hornbeam <i>Carpinus carolinia</i>	Decid.	30 feet	Inconspicuous	Moist to average	N			X						X
Remarks: Good tree where there are high water tables.														
Bald cypress <i>Taxodium distichum</i>	Decid.	125 feet	Inconspicuous	Wet, acid	L	X					X			X
Remarks: Will grow on drier soils, if watered.														
Calamondin, satsuma <i>Citrus</i> spp.	BLEV	variable 10-20 feet	White Spring	Fertile, well drained	L	X								
Remarks: Higher fertilizer requirement. Pest problems. Do not mulch.														
Cherry laurel <i>Prunus caroliniana</i>	BLEV	35 feet	White Early spring	Fertile, well drained	L	X	X	X	X		X			X
Remarks: Fragrant foliage. Attractive to birds. Good native evergreen tree. Will not tolerate wet feet.														
Crape myrtle <i>Lagerstroemia</i> spp.	Decid.	20-30 feet	Various Spring, summer	Any	L-M	X	X	X	X					
Remarks: Old-fashioned planting. Spectacular when in flower.														
Cypress <i>Cupressus</i> spp.	Conifer	50-80 feet	Inconspicuous	Average to dry	M	X								X
Remarks: Wind break. Italian (<i>Cupressus sempervirens</i>) & Arizona (<i>Cupressus arizonica</i>) most common.														
Dogwood <i>Cornus florida</i>	Decid.	40 feet	White Spring	Well drained	L	X	X	X	X		X			
Remarks: Attractive to birds. Pink flowered forms not well adapted to Fla. Beautiful native tree.														
Fringe tree <i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>	Decid.	30 feet	White Spring	Average	N	X								
Remarks: Should be used more widely in north Fla. Beautiful, flowering native tree.														
Holly <i>Ilex</i> spp.	BLEV	40-50 feet	White Spring	Average	L-M	X	X	X	X		X			X

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Remarks: Tolerates neglect. Includes American, yaupon, dahoon and many varieties.											
Jerusalem thorn <i>Parkinsonia aculeata</i>	Decid.	30 feet	Yellow Spring, summer	Any, well drained	L	X					
Remarks: Tolerates neglect. Excellent flowering tree. Unattractive seed pods.											
Loquat <i>Eriobotrya japonica</i>	BLEV	25 feet	White Late fall	Average	L	X		X			
Remarks: Excellent edible fruit. Fruit rarely matures in north Fla. due to cold											
Oaks <i>Quercus</i> spp.	BLEV	60-100 feet	Inconspicuous	Well drained	H	X		X		X	X
Remarks: Only live oaks are salt tolerant. Live, laurel and water oaks available.											
Pecan <i>Carya illinoensis</i>	Decid.	100 feet	Inconspicuous	Fertile, average	N						X
Remarks: Produces edible nut. Wide spreading tree.											
Pine <i>Pinus</i> spp.	Conifer	70-120 feet	Inconspicuous	Any, well drained	M-H	X		X		X	X
Remarks: Grows rapidly. Spruce and longleaf best.											
Podocarpus <i>Podocarpus</i> spp.	Conifer	50-70 feet	Inconspicuous	Fertile, well drained	M	X		X		X	
Remarks: Usually not intentionally planted as a tree.											
Redbud <i>Cercis canadensis</i>	Decid.	30 feet	Rose Spring	Average	N	X		X		X	X
Remarks: Grows rapidly. Beautiful flowering tree.											
Red cedar <i>Juniperus</i> spp.	Conifer	50-100 feet	Inconspicuous	Any	M	X				X	X
Remarks: Attractive to birds. Tolerates neglect. Difficult to transplant.											
Red maple <i>Acer rubrum</i>	Decid.	70 feet	Red Spring	Moist to average	N	X		X		X	X
Remarks: Does not grow well on sandy ridges. Good fall color.											

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River birch <i>Betula nigra</i>	Decid.	50 feet	Inconspicuous	Moist	N	X		X						X
Remarks: Peeling bark is very attractive. Yellow fall color.														
Chinese elm <i>Ulmus parvifolia</i>	Decid.	45 feet	Inconspicuous	Average, dry	L	X		X						X
Remarks: Rapid growth. Not to be confused with <i>Ulmus pumila</i> , also called Chinese elm.														
Southern magnolia <i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>	BLEV	100 feet	White Spring	Moist, well drained	M	X		X					X	X
Remarks: Difficult to transplant. Old-fashioned planting. Fragrant flowers.														
Sweet gum <i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>	Decid.	100 feet	Inconspicuous	Any	N					X				X
Remarks: Difficult to transplant. Red, yellow & purple in the fall. Rapid growth. Produces messy, sharply pointed fruit.														
Sycamore <i>Platanus occidentalis</i>	Decid.	100 feet	Inconspicuous	Any, well drained	L	X						X		X
Remarks: Tolerates neglect. Difficult to transplant bare root. Rapid growth.														
Tulip tree <i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>	Decid.	100 feet	Greenish-yellow Spring	Average	N					X				X
Remarks: Fairly fast growing. Tulip-like flowers.														
Wax myrtle <i>Myrica cerifera</i>	BLEV	20-30 feet	Inconspicuous	Any	M-H	X		X		X			X	
Remarks: An excellent small native tree. Should be used more. Scented foliage.														
¹ Type of Tree: BLEV - Broad Leaved Evergreen, in leaf year around; Semi-Ev. - Semi-Evergreen, leafless for only a short period; Decid. - Deciduous, without leaves during part of the year; Conifer - Evergreen, but narrow leaved														
² Soil adaptability - Soil type for best growth														
³ Salt Spray tolerance: H - Highly salt tolerant, may be used in exposed areas near shore line; M - Moderately, if near shore must be protected; L - Low, must be used in well protected areas back from shore; N - No salt tolerance or salt tolerance unknown														
Note: Scientific names listed here are correct according to the source <i>Hortus Third, A Concise Dictionary of Plants Cultivated in the United States and Canada</i> , revised and expanded by the staff of the Library Hyde Bailey Hortum, New York State University at Cornell University, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1976.														