DIVISION OF
AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES
AND NATURAL RESOURCES
NEWS RELEASE

Tips for placing trees in the landscape

In 1913, Joyce Kilmer penned one of her most famous poems called "Trees." The first line in the poem reads: "I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree." Though the words flow together and create a picture in your mind, Kilmer insists that no poem can capture the beauty of a tree and that human art fails to match the beauty and majesty of nature.

Trees often add an element of beauty to the landscape and perform a variety of functions. Trees are much more than a simply a place to hang a swing. They give architectural form and organization to a space. They provide shade that can offer cost-saving measures for homeowners. Trees also reduce noise and air pollution and make a home more attractive and valuable.

When placing trees in the landscape, they can be planted as single specimens, in groups or in a mass, depending on the design the homeowner wants. As a single specimen, a tree often is the focal point in the design. In group plantings, the trees as a unit become a landscape feature. Often, but not always, groupings often are the same species. In a mass planting, trees lose their individuality and appear as one larger unit in the design.

No matter how a homeowner plans to plant trees, careful site selection is crucial to ensure the long-term health of the tree, as well as to ensure safety within the landscape. Trees not only grow to great size above ground, but the root system also becomes quite large, so spaces both above and below ground are essential.

Trees less than 25 feet tall should be placed a minimum of 20 feet from overhead power lines. Medium trees, those reaching 30 to 50 feet, shouldn't be planted any closer than 35 feet from powerlines. Large trees maturing at over 50 feet should be at least 45 feet from powerlines. The ultimate mature height and spread of a tree must fit within the available growing space beneath and alongside the lines. This information can be found on plant labels and in catalogs.

Before digging holes to plant new trees, call OKIE to have the utility lines marked on the property. Don't plant a tree within 10 feet of underground utility lines.

Overhead and underground utility lines aren't the only things that need to be taken into consideration. Keep in mind a tree's root system can extend two to three times beyond the canopy. When placing trees near buildings, a good rule of thumb is to set the tree at a distance to the building that is equal to or greater than half of the tree's mature width. Ten feet from a building is sufficient for smaller trees.

Don't forget about pavement, fences and other structures. Leave a minimum of 3 feet free of obstacles on all sides of the tree to avoid problems such as broken pavement and possible home foundation problems.

Other things to consider when placing trees in the landscape:

- Blocking windows or desirable views
- Blocking traffic signs or views around corners
- Shading vegetable or flower gardens
- Encroaching on the neighbor's property

A consultation with a local landscape architect or other qualified professional may be in order to help plan the landscape.

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