

Some Less Common but Great Landscape Trees

The other day I received a unique question. I was asked, "If I could have any one tree in my yard, what would it be?" I honestly could not give a simple answer. I tend to have favorite trees that fit certain situations instead of just one favorite. I take into account things such as how large a tree will eventually get, cold hardiness, how tolerant of our soil it is, fall color and pest resistance.

Starting with shade trees, a few I find useful include various oaks, sycamore, Japanese zelkova and common hackberry. There are many oaks used in the landscape outside of the Intermountain West. Unfortunately, locally they are less common. One that seems to do especially well is English oak. This tree is usually available in a columnar form but also can be found as a regular shade tree. Of all of the oaks, it is relatively easy to establish and has a faster growth rate than its close relatives.

Two other oaks that seem to perform well include bur oak and swamp white oak. Bur oak is a native of the Midwest and tolerates our soil as well as any tree. Swamp white oak is relatively new to the landscape industry, but seems to do well where it is planted.

Japanese zelkova is less common but grows well in warmer areas of Cache Valley. It has a vase shape and beautiful orange to red fall color. Over the last few years, columnar types and forms that stay small enough to grow under power lines have also been introduced.

Common hackberry is tolerant of all but the worst soil. Once it is established, it is drought tolerant and grows 18 to 24 inches per year. It is an excellent tree to try in harsh soil, especially before planting cottonwoods or willows.

With today's smaller yards, large shade trees such as the above do not always make sense. There are many medium sized trees that perform well also. Two maples that fit into this category are State Street maple and Tatarian maple. Both grow to 30 to 40 feet in height and width and are very cold hardy. Tatarian maple is often sold under the names of Rugged Charm or Hot Wings maple and has nice orange to red fall color.

As for smaller trees, many are available. One of my absolute favorites is Washington hawthorn. It has a very refined look, white spring flowers and beautiful orange to red fall color. Other hawthorns are also very useful. Some include Lavallo, Toba, thornless cockspur and Russian hawthorns.

Finally, there are many useful crabapples. One that is very common but fruitless is Spring Snow. It is fragrant and has showy, white spring blossoms. Another newer introduction includes Royal Raindrops. It has red leaves and pink flowers. What fruit it does get stays on the tree until birds pick it off.