Acreage Living

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Cooperative Extension

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Buying Trees and Shrubs

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Trees and shrubs for home landscapes or wildlife plantings are available from many sources. Buying from mail order or catalog sources may seem convenient, but ordering from them can be risky since you cannot see the product. Local nurseries or garden centers are good places to start looking since you can see what you are buying.

Nurseries sell trees and shrubs in various ways. These include bare root, container-grown, containerized, and balled and burlapped. In general, smaller trees and shrubs adapt quicker to planting than larger specimens. This is especially true for trees.

Bare root trees and shrubs do not have soil around their roots. They are usually less expensive and smaller than container grown, containerized, or balled and burlapped plants. Bare root plants should be purchased and planted when the buds are dormant, usually in March or April.

Container-grown plants have been grown in containers for a year or longer. They are ready to plant when their root systems are developed, and they are not placed on the market until then. Roots should be numerous and preferably not circling inside the container. These plants experience the least shock from transplanting.

Containerized plants are bare root plants that have been planted in containers in early spring. They are sold later that same spring after they have leafed out or begun to grow. They have been in a container for less than one growing season.

Balled and burlapped (B&B) trees and shrubs are dug either from a nursery field or from the wild. Those dug from the wild are called collected stock. Collected stock generally is less successful than nursery-grown stock because many roots are lost when trees are dug up from the wild. Balled and burlapped plants are only available for sale when they are ready to plant.

In early spring, most deciduous trees will be dormant and without leaves. Check several branches to determine if the tree is alive. Scrape the bark of a branch with your fingernail. Green tissue beneath the bark indicates the branch is alive. In addition, live twigs and branches are usually flexible. A dead branch will snap and break. Live buds are swollen and plump.

The root system of a plant is just as important as the leaves and branches. To check the root system, grasp the trunk of the tree near the base and try to move the tree in the container. Well-rooted plants should not create a hole in the soil

when the stem is shaken. The container and the tree should move as one.

Containerized plants can be removed from the container and the root system examined without harming the tree. Healthy roots are firm and usually lighter in color than the surrounding soil. There should be no offensive odor or mushiness. Ask a nursery employee for permission and/or assistance before pulling the plant from its container.

Carry trees by their container or root ball rather than by their trunks to avoid damaging their root systems. B&B trees are checked much the same way as a containerized tree. The ball should not have cracks in the soil or large clumps of loose soil. If it does, these are indications of improper handling, which could mean trouble later.

Avoid trees that appear too large for their container or root ball. This may indicate that the tree is pot bound. Pot bound plants often develop circling roots which, left uncorrected, can eventually girdle or choke the tree. At planting, cut the root system vertically at regular intervals at the outer edge of the soil ball and pull the root system apart. This will encourage new roots to spread into the surrounding soil.

Before purchasing a tree, check the soil or roots to make sure it is moist. The leaves should not be drooping or wilted. Healthy trees have good foliage color and full-sized leaves. Leaves should be pliable yet firm.

Avoid trees with broken branches, wounds on the trunk, poorly colored foliage, and signs of insects, diseases, or other problems. Check the trunk for mechanical injury, environmental injury such as sunscald, or animal damage.

Check to make sure the plant grew at least four inches last season. To do this, look for last year's terminal bud scale scars. Then measure the amount the twig grew last year before it set a new terminal bud. A knowledgeable nursery person can show you how to do this.

Look at the tree's form and overall shape. Branches should emerge from the trunk at angles greater than 45 degrees. Pruning may help sometimes, but the shape of the tree will probably stay the same.

Select trees that have only one main trunk that is straight and has not been pruned back at the top. Branches should be spaced about eight to twelve inches apart. They should be evenly distributed on all sides of the central leader. There should be branches around the upper one-third to one-half of the central leader. Avoid trees that have been excessively limbed up or with branches that have been pruned back.

Branches with foliage along the lower trunk contribute to its growth in diameter and its strength. The trunk should be straight and it should thicken as it tapers from top to bottom. Ideally, the tree should be able to stand up without staking. If not, it should need staking for no longer than one year after planting.

Make sure the species or cultivar you are interested in is adapted to your location and cultural requirements. Find out if it has any unusual problems or undesirable traits. Be sure to ask about improved cultivars of trees that have been specially developed to have fewer problems than their previous counterparts. Improved cultivars may cost a little more, but are usually worth it.

The type of tree, its growth rate, availability, and size all affect its price. Most popular landscape trees range from $50 to $250. Slow-growing or rare trees often exceed this range. Often, you can plant your own tree, but if it is large, you may be better off having a nursery install it. The cost of this service may be high, but a warranty usually comes with the installation.

It is often best to buy plants from nurseries that have owners and employees who are knowledgeable about the plants they sell and practice proper handling and care of their plants. Quiz the nursery staff and see if they can answer your questions sufficiently, remembering that they are in the business of selling.

If you cannot plant as soon as you get your trees and shrubs home, then make sure you take care of them until you can. Temporarily store plants in a shady location. Do not let their roots dry out. Partially bury the roots of bare-root trees by digging a shallow trench, placing the roots in the trench and covering them with moist soil or organic matter.

\For more information on tree selection, planting, and care, contact your ISU Extension office, district forester, or check out the forestry publications on at http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/fo2.htm

Home Insulation

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Looking for a fast, easy, and economical way to:

- Be warmer in winter?
- Be cooler in summer?
- Save money on heating bills?
- Save money on cooling bills?
- Reduce drafts and increase comfort?

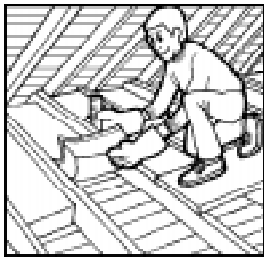
And does your home have:

- Less than 6 inches of insulation in the attic?
- No insulation in the sidewalls?
- No insulation on the basement walls?

If you said yes, then add insulation. Half of the average Iowan's energy bill goes toward heating and cooling. By insulating your house, you can reduce this bill – in some cases dramatically – and be more comfortable, too.

Heat leaks from warmer areas to cooler areas. In the winter, warmth leaks out through walls, attics, and basements. Insulation slows that rate of heat loss so less heat leaks out during the winter. The more insulation, the more the savings. You should have at least R-38 to R-44 in the attic (10-15 inches of insulation). In the summer, heat leaks into the house, making the air conditioner work harder and longer and increasing your cooling bills. The more attic insulation, the more the savings in summer too.

Insulation should be installed between any heated (or cooled) space and an unheated space. If possible, insulate sidewalls and floors over unheated crawl spaces to R-19 or more. Finished or heated basements should have a minimum of R-10.



While insulating, you also should also seal air leaks, caulk, provide vapor retarders, and install adequate ventilation in attics and crawl spaces. Installing insulation and tightening up the house will change air and heat flows. Tightening a house affects combustion air for older natural-draft gas-fired heating appliances and fireplaces. Often, after air tightening, there is insufficient air for proper combustion and drafting of vents and chimneys. Have a qualified heating contractor inspect your home to ensure your home will have adequate combustion and make-up air openings after your air-tightening work. The contractor might suggest you install additional combustion air openings to outdoors or suggest that you buy a new high-efficiency direct-vent sealed-combustion heating unit, or change to electric heat. The contractor is right. These new heating appliances work well even in super-tight houses and will help you save even more on utility bills. The energy savings and extra safety might be worth the extra expense.

Don't put off insulating your home. Insulating will make you and your family more comfortable, save you money, and help reduce the need for extra energy in the U.S. Don't forget to check with your utility company for possible technical

assistance and for any monetary incentives they might have. Some power suppliers have programs to help you decide where to add insulation and to help you pay for it.

For more information on home insulation, and energy savings, contact your county Extension office or check housing bulletins at these websites: http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/ho.htm; http://www.energy.iastate.edu/efficiency/residential/homeseries/index.htm

Watch for the SMV

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This is the time of year when driving in Iowa can be both a joy to the senses and a risk to your life. Fall brings out the vibrant colors of the harvest season, but it also brings the steady stream of slow moving vehicles and farm equipment traffic.

Over 300 traffic collisions involve farm vehicles in Iowa each year. Many of these farm vehicle collisions occur during harvest season. October has nearly twice as many collisions as any other month. The most common time of day for collisions is between 4 and 8 p.m. Collisions with left-turning farm vehicles and rear end collisions with farm vehicles top the list of accident scenarios.

To protect yourself and others, watch for the orange and red triangle that indicates a slow moving vehicle.

Lingo Lexicon:
(brief definitions of current environmental jargon)
Hypoxia - literally, low oxygen. Hypoxia generally refers to a condition where an area of water with abnormally low dissolved oxygen (less than 2 parts per million dissolved oxygen) exists near the mouth of the Mississippi river in the Gulf of Mexico. The area of hypoxic water varies in size and shape from year to year, sometimes as large as 7000 square miles (one eighth the size of Iowa), and sometimes not existing at all. Hypoxia can have negative effects on aquatic life and the fishing industry in the gulf. The primary cause of hypoxia is excessive microorganism growth resulting from nitrogen flowing down the Mississippi. Plans for reducing hypoxia center mainly around reduced nitrogen use and losses from the farm land in the Mississippi watershed (including a significant share from Iowa). More information on hypoxia can be found at http://www.epa.gov/msbasin/msrhp.html

This SMV (Slow Moving Vehicle) sign is required on the back of any farm vehicle or implement that travels the road at less than 25 miles per hour. Be alert for farm traffic and slow down well in advance when you approach.

For more information, ask your county Extension office for bulletin Pm-1629, Safety on Iowa Roads, or check out the web version at http://www.extnet.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1629.pdf.

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