



## What to do about....

# Choosing Tree Species

When deciding on which tree species to purchase, it is of utmost importance to do some investigation and planning beforehand. A tree planted in the wrong place can potentially be an expensive mistake. For instance, a tree with a mature height of 40 feet will be butchered when it eventually grows into the utility lines above it. A young blue spruce may look nice in your new foundation bed but you will find it to be entirely too big for the bed, potentially harmful to the foundation and completely engulfing the house ten years from now. Or you may find your new tree dead in the spring if you've planted a species which needs a well drained location and you have planted it in a place with poorly drained soils.

**Step 1: Evaluate the location.** First of all call 811, the "Call Before You Dig" number to have any underground utilities marked and stay well away from those lines. Then evaluate your site choice carefully. What type of soil is in this location – wet or well drained and is it eroded? Check the Marion County Soil Survey or call the SWCD office for general soils information for your area of the county. A simple soil test will give you an indication of soil nutrient needs and whether the pH needs adjustment.

Does this location get full sun or is it shaded part or most of the day? Are there any physical features nearby that may eventually interfere with the growth of the tree? For instance, overhead utility lines, buildings or even other trees that may compete with the tree once it grows closer to its mature height. Also consider the extent to which the root system will spread when the tree reaches maturity. Keep enough distance to protect existing perforated drainage tiles, septic system fingers, building foundations, sidewalks or areas tilled for gardening. Remember that tree roots will grow out further than the branches spread above them, so give them plenty of space.

**Step 2: What tree qualities are you looking for?** Does your yard need more color in the fall; interesting aesthetics in the winter, or pretty blooms in the spring? Are you interested in providing food or shelter for the birds and other wildlife? Do you need a windbreak for winter winds or shade to decrease your air conditioning costs in the summer? Think about these types of qualities as you study tree species.

**Step 3: Study!** Look through tree books to find species that will be well suited to your planting site and will also have the qualities that you are looking for. A good reference book to have on hand is Charles Deam's "Trees of Indiana" or "Native Trees of the Midwest" by Sally Weeks, Harmon Weeks and George Parker. Take note of maintenance needs and any weaknesses in a tree species such as susceptibility to certain diseases or pests.

Choosing native species has a number of benefits in both health of the tree and providing food and shelter for wildlife. Also study up on how to plant and care for your new trees correctly to ensure that they have a good start. Contact the Marion County SWCD for more information and dates for their next tree sale.

**For more information contact the Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District  
(317)786-1776 [www.marionswcd.org](http://www.marionswcd.org)**