Native landscape trees add variety to your landscape

Source: William Fountain, extension professor, Department of Horticulture

Sure, we love our dogwoods and redbuds in the spring, but why limit ourselves to using only those two trees? There are many native trees that could add beauty and variety to your landscape over all four seasons. Plus, a diversity of plantings will attract and sustain more native wildlife. Well-landscaped homes can improve resale value by 7% to 10%.

Here are some native trees that could work well in your landscape.

Yellowwood is thought to be our best medium-sized, native flowering tree. Its white, fragrant, pea-like flowers hang in 15-inch-long clusters in spring, and the tree offers attractive yellow fall foliage. Its fruit is a ~~typical~~ yellow-green legume pod and ripens in the fall. Yellowwood also has a beautiful framework of branches with smooth, gray bark that provides winter interest, but the tree's multiple trunk habit ~~makes it~~ can make it prone to limb breakage at the crotch. It must be pruned to ensure good branch angles.

Allegheny serviceberry is a multi-stemmed small tree reaching up to 25 feet tall. It produces large white flowers very early in spring and bluish green fruit that attracts birds. Allegheny serviceberry grows best in partial shade; it will show signs of stress if grown in full sun in dry areas. The cultivar A. laevis ‘Cumulus' usually grows from a single stem and has a moderately columnar growth habit. It is offered more commonly than the species. Allegheny serviceberry is especially attractive when planted in front of an evergreen background. There are many other types of serviceberries. You can’t go wrong with any of them.

Blackgum, with its waxy spring foliage, brilliant orange to scarlet red to deep purple fall color and striking winter form, has great ornamental value. As it grows older, its graceful, drooping branches add to the distinct form and beauty of this tree. Blackgum adapts to extreme climates, tolerates wet conditions and is resistant to drought. Although it will grow in full sun or partial shade, its fall color is enhanced by sunny conditions. Flowers are small and insignificant. The bitter, half-inch blue-black drupes are not particularly ornamental but are favored by wildlife.

Sourwood. Truly a tree for all seasons, sourwood is one of our most beautiful natives and is ideal as a small specimen tree. It has lovely flowers that open in mid-summer, excellent fall color and hanging clusters of fruit in the winter. Fall color ranges from red to purple to yellow, and all three colors are often on the same tree. It has the best red of any of our natives. The tree can be grown in full sun or partial shade although flowering and fall color are best in full sun. Sourwood trees are very attractive to bees and sourwood honey is common in the South. In order to grow well, it requires an acidic soil high in organic matter. Limestone in the soil or soils derived from limestone are a prescription for failure.

Green hawthorn is an adaptable, urban-tolerant tree that offers winter interest with its abundant and attractive orange-red fruit. It has pretty red to gold foliage in fall and handsome silver-gray peeling bark that shows orange underneath. Its lower branches need to be pruned to a height of 6 to 8 feet in high-traffic areas because of the tree's inch-long thorns. 'Winter King' is an excellent cultivar for the landscape and is superior in flower and fruit production.

Carolina silverbell is a good small tree for shrub or woodland borders. It may have a rounded, pyramidal or vase-shaped habit. Its white, bell-shaped flowers bloom in April and May and are best seen from below the tree, since they hang on pendulous stalks. Carolina silverbell is relatively pest resistant as long as it is in a good soil and not stressed by drought. The tree is especially attractive when set off against an evergreen background. Rhododendrons, which also require a good, organic soil, grow well beneath it.

Information about these and other native trees can be found at https://www.uky.edu/hort/Native-Trees-of-Kentucky. For more information on how to train or prune a tree for a good branching habit, consult an ISA Certified Arborist. You can find one near you at https://www.treesaregood.org/.

For additional information on landscape plantings, contact the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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