

An important part of a balanced landscape are the small trees that provide a transition between the tall shade trees and the foundation shrubs and lawn. The trees can be showy or inconspicuous most of the year. Some are shade tolerant and others only prosper in full sun.

Crape myrtle are small trees that are planted for their summer bloom. They require full sun to deliver the bloom for which they are valued. Plant them as specimens or in rows. Among the desirable characteristics of crape myrtles is that there is a choice of size and color to meet every full sun landscape situation. There are also many colors to choose from including white and many shades of lavender, red, pink, and purple. The website plantanswers.com has a chart listing many of the crape myrtle varieties available along with their height, flower color, powdery mildew resistance, and bark characteristics. Crape myrtles are deciduous and some have good fall color.

Vitex is another full sun blooming tree. It grows to about 25 feet tall with blue/purple blooms that resemble lilacs. Vitex is renowned for its drought tolerance and is not eaten by the deer. Butterflies and hummingbirds visit the vitex blooms as a summer nectar source. Use vitex as a specimen tree.

Redbud is the classic landscape transition tree. It grows to 30 ft. tall and is shade tolerant. It is usually planted on or under the edge of large shade trees where it is inconspicuous for most of the year except for 3 weeks in February when the pink blooms emerge before the leaves as an introduction to spring. The Texas and Oklahoma selections are more drought tolerant than the Eastern selection. The Texas redbud has shiny green leaves about 3 inches across. The Eastern redbud has larger leaves (4 inches) that are not shiny. Texas and Oklahoma redbud are included on the latest SAWS Landscape Rebate/Coupon.

Mexican plum is another small tree (15 feet tall) that has some shade tolerance. It can be used in a grouping of 3 or more trees to provide an attractive wildlife thicket or it can be used as a transition tree that is a step down from redbud on the edge of the landscape. I also like Mexican plum as a specimen tree in full sun where it produces a rounded crown that has white blooms in February. Birds such as cardinals and mockingbirds use the dense crown as a nesting site. The small fruit is edible and a favorite of the birds in mid-summer. In most neighborhoods deer do not seem to eat Mexican plum stems or foliage. The fall foliage color is yellow.

For an evergreen tree consider loquat. It is also called Japanese plum. True to its origins it has an exotic look with thick oblong pointed leaves carried on horizontal branches in a narrow crown. The tree grows to 30 feet tall. Loquat is shade tolerant. It has off-white blooms in January that produce loads of edible golden fruits in March if there are no severe freezes between bloom and the fruiting period. Birds and mammals such as opossums and raccoons love the fruit. Loquat is disciplined in its upright growth habit so makes an excellent row planting in sun or shade.

Mexican olive has a tongue shaped leaf that is thick like loquat leaves but its crown does not grow upright. Mexican olive spreads out to fill the available space. The large white blooms are the tree's main attraction. For most of the summer the 2 inch flowers decorate the crown. Hummingbirds and butterflies visit the blooms for nectar. Some of the flowers are followed by an olive- like fruit that does not usually get eaten by wildlife but decomposes quickly when it falls to the ground. Mexican olive is evergreen if the winter is mild but will defoliate and even die back to the ground in winters with temperatures below 20 degrees F. The plant has been difficult to obtain in past years but is now

available at area nurseries. Grow Mexican olive in full sun. It grows to 25 feet tall. It is another of the small trees that is part of the SAWS WaterSaver Landscape Coupon Program.

Texas persimmon is a native tree that grows to 15 feet tall. The female plants produce an edible fruit that is a favorite of birds and other wildlife. In mid-summer when the fruit ripens the trees are usually alive with woodpeckers, mockingbirds and cardinals pulling the flesh from the large seeded fruits. Texas persimmon leaves are small and leathery. Although most Texas persimmon exist in landscapes hidden in thickets, the species produces a compact dense crown that makes it attractive as a specimen tree. Nurseries that participate in the SAWS WaterSaver Coupon Program have Texas persimmon available.