Shade Trees

Distribute 10-18-2018

Now is a good time to plant shade trees. Planted in the fall and early winter, the trees have a chance to develop a root system before they must face the South Texas summer.

For the customers of the CPS Utility it is also a good time to plant a shade tree because you can receive a $50 rebate for up to 5 shade trees. Plant the trees to shade your house on the south and west sides and reduce air-conditioning costs by 25%.

Select the tree species based on the list of recommended species provided by CPS. The species were identified because they grow large enough to provide shade and they are well adapted to prosper in our alkaline soils, high temperatures, frequent drought periods, and collection of pests.

The species on the CPS list are anaqua, live oak, Texas red oak, Shumard oak, Mexican sycamore, Montezuma cypress, bald cypress, Arizona cypress, bur oak, cedar elm, mesquite, pecan, Mexican white oak, big tooth maple, Sierra oak, lacey oak, Texas ebony, and chinkapin oak. Some of the species are unusual in that we don't usually see them on the recommended tree lists, but all the most familiar are also listed.

To take advantage of the rebate the tree you purchase must be growing in a 5 gallon or larger container. Large trees are desirable but depending on the condition of your soil it may be very difficult to dig a hole to accommodate a tree in a large sized container. Be content to purchase the size tree that can be planted without a jackhammer, the smaller specimens will quickly adjust to their situation and often outgrow larger specimens of the same species.

Dig the hole in the soil at the same depth as the container and 2 to 3 times as wide as the root ball. Fill the hole around the root ball with the native soil that was removed from the hole. There are several advantages to replacing the soil from the hole back into place. Most of our area soils are heavy and if you fill a hole in heavy soils with light soil such as compost or potting mix, there is a chance that the planting hole will accept water easier than it will drain. The result in a rainy period could be that the planting hole does not drain, and the new root system will rot in the soggy hole.

You also want the new tree to send its roots into the native soil rather than stay in the hole with the compost. For the 5-gallon transplant to become a shade tree it must send a root system into the native soil where it is planted.

Water the newly planted shade tree at planting so that the planting hole is filled with water and then place 3 to 4 inches of mulch on the soil over the roots. The mulch will reduce water evaporation from the soil and reduce weed growth. Weeds compete with the newly planted tree for nutrients and water. Eliminating weed or sod growth near the tree trunk also reduces the temptation to use your string mower near the vulnerable tree trunk. Wounds from the string mower can injure the vascular system, reducing the transfer of water and nutrients from the roots into the foliage.

Leaves work well as a mulch and so do chopped bark or brush. Don't pile it on the trunk but it can be spread over the rest of the root system. Water the tree every time that the soil under the mulch dries to the touch.