



Plant a Tree for Trinidad

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We live in a very special place, with the Sangre de Cristo Mountains on the western horizon, the iconic southwestern landmark Fishers Peak, and the Purgatoire River leading through town toward the expanse of the Great Plains. Historic architecture and rambling brick streets set the tone for a charm that cannot be duplicated.

Thanks to our city staff for all the hours put into writing grants and seeing potential in forgotten pockets of the city, we now have plans and funding in place to create the fantastic 28-acre downtown Boulevard Addition Nature Park that will tie into our existing River Walk. This, along with a new designation as an Emerging Arts District, the creation of the new city-sponsored Tree Board, and potentially joining Tree City USA, among other exciting developments, shows that we are poised to create our own renaissance here in Trinidad.

I think we all have our own part to play in bringing about Trinidad's renaissance. There are of course unlimited ways of getting involved, but with the City just starting to address the much-needed task of removing the many dead trees on our streets, parks and golf course, it's a great time to pitch in by planting a tree.

There are many benefits to planting a tree, including diverting storm water runoff, creating wildlife shelter and habitat, improving air quality, and generating beauty and economic benefits. For example, planting a windbreak of trees in the right spot can help to offset heating costs in the winter. A deciduous tree planted on the southern or western exposure of a house will create a soothing blanket of shade to help the home stay cooler on those hot summer days and allow the sun to warm its interior in winter. Trees not only provide invaluable shade but are also hard at work absorbing air pollutants such as ozone, carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide, meanwhile giving off oxygen through their leaves (Colorado Tree Coalition). A well-planted landscape can also substantially add to the value of your home. Last but certainly not least, trees add priceless beauty to yards, streets and parks.

If you are thinking about planting a tree, there are a few things to consider.

1. The tree you choose must have enough space to grow to its mature height and width.
2. The proper light requirements should be available at the planting spot.
3. Find out what kind of soil the planting area has. Is it sandy or heavy in clay? Trees have varied adaptability to different soil conditions, composition and drainage capacity. It's great to be able to match these to a tree that will do well under your specific conditions.
4. Trees have different water needs. Are you planting in a watered lawn or in the dry neglected corner of your yard? For a thriving healthy tree, be sure to pick one that will do well with what you have to offer it. And remember, no matter what its water needs are, all trees require regular watering until established.
5. Before you start digging the hole for your new tree, find out the location of your cable, gas, sewer and water lines and call for a utility locate.

There are hundreds of trees to choose from that are very well adapted to this climate. Certainly there is one to fit what you are looking for: large and shade-producing or dainty with beautiful spring flowers, or perhaps an evergreen for year round interest.

Choosing the right tree is best done in context to our local environment. We live in a dry climate that can get quite hot in the summer with temperatures dropping below zero on a winter night. So planting a hardy tree with at least some drought tolerance that is well acclimated to our area will ensure success in your garden.

There are many resources that can aid you when making a choice on your prospective tree, such as the Colorado Tree Coalition website www.coloradotrees.org which offers extensive tree lists with photos, and the Colorado State University Extension website www.ext.colostate.edu. Our local library has some great gardening books to help you find ideas too.

There is something to be said for diversity, whether we are talking about long term health of our urban forest or just for the eye to behold, so take advantage of all the options out there and try to pick something other than what your neighbors have.

A large deciduous shade-producing tree well suited to this area is the Hackberry *Celtis occidentals*, which resembles the American elm in form but is much less prone to the diseases of this formerly common street tree. The London Plane Tree *Platanus acerfolia* is a fantastic large specimen, and with the proper space in a watered lawn it will be a star with its beautiful ornamental bark resembling a patchwork quilt of white, gray and brown; just make sure it doesn't compete with the surrounding grass and receives periodic deep waterings during a drought.

If your garden receives little water, like most in Trinidad, and experiences severe exposure and drainage issues, try planting species native to the Southwest. Besides being well adapted, native plants also provide environmental context to your yard. Depending on how it is pruned, locally growing New Mexico Locust *Robina neomexicana* is a small tree or large shrub with wonderful racemes of pink flowers in spring and offers superb drought tolerance. Place this locust in the dry, hot neglected corner of your yard for a little low-maintenance beauty. Or for a shadier spot in need of excellent fall color try the petite native maples Bigtooth Maple *Acer grandidentatum* and Rocky Mountain Maple *Acer glabrum*. Both look great pruned into multi-stem habits as small specimen trees. Maples appreciate supplemental water but will tolerate dry conditions once fully established.

A star native evergreen is the Rocky Mountain Juniper *Juniperus scopulorum*. With its diverse cultivated forms and wispy blue green foliage, you can find one to fit the size and shape you are looking for. Whether columnar and formal, stout in stature for a windbreak, or elegant and diminutive, all varieties are extremely hardy and drought tolerant. I planted a fabulous mid-sized weeping Juniper—nicknamed “Cousin It”—in my front yard that functions as an absolutely stunning focal point year round.

The hardy, heat-tolerant Hawthorn *Crataegus* family has several members that are perfect for the climate here in Trinidad, and most are small in stature, disease resistant, and offer spring flowers and great fall color.

There are so many more wonderful trees that would do quite well in our corner of the world. Find one that suits you and plant it in your yard, for the sake of beauty or economic and environmental value. Every tree adds to our urban forest and in turn helps to enhance our beautiful little city in many ways. Together we can make a difference. Happy planting!

Resources:

Colorado Tree Coalition. “Why Plant a Tree.” 2012 Colorado Tree Coalition. Web. 20 February 2013.

Phillips, Judith. *Plants for Natural Gardens*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995.