

UNL Extension: Acreage Insights

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Fall Is for Planting

By [John Fech](#), UNL Extension Educator

The Nursery Council says, “Fall is for Planting” - Trees, Shrubs, Bulbs, Lawns and Flowers. You bet. Fall is actually one of the best times to plant. Why? Many reasons.

First, the soils are warm in fall. Warm soil temps are necessary to encourage new root formation into the planting hole to help the plant become established.

Secondly, air temperatures have begun to drop off from the 90's and 100's of August and encourage new growth for the shoots. In fall, a more regular watering pattern is the norm, unlike the spring.

Fall offers the opportunity to replace plants that have been damaged from summer heat and drought. Look around your landscape. You probably have “holes” that need to be filled. Take the opportunity to add a shrub or two to a grouping, or to create one. If you have a nice, healthy dogwood or viburnum by itself, add two more to make a mass of 3. The impact of the spring flowers will be much more impressive when viewed in mass.

Finally, fall planting offers the advantage of bargains at the garden center. In every year that I've been involved in the green industry, fall specials have been commonplace. The prospect of obtaining that tree you've been wanting becomes a little easier at 25% off the regular price. Or make plans to attend the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum's Fall Plant Sale, September 24 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

“Plants are less stressed by the heat, more likely to develop a strong root system and gardeners will be way ahead of the game next spring,” said Bob Henrickson, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum horticulture program coordinator. Bob and other horticulturists will be available during the plant sale to answer questions on landscape design, plant selection, native plants, rain gardens, pests, diseases and other challenges.

Pawpaw trees will be available—a fast-growing, colonizing tree with large tropical-looking leaves. Native to Nebraska, it grows 20-25' high and 15' wide. Edible fruits look and taste like bananas and ripen in early fall.

According to Bob, one of the best trees for fall color is black gum. It grows to about 30' high and has waxy leaves that turn lustrous red in fall. It tends to have a very horizontal branching pattern and, important after this summer's weather, is resistant to both drought and short term flooding. For a much larger, shade-providing tree, try a London planetree, a tough street tree that grows to 100' high.

Other good additions to the landscape include an “old-fashioned” small shrub, mockorange, with fragrant flowers in early spring; native dwarf leadplant or pale purple coneflower. For shady areas, Culver’s root has delicate white flowers in mid-summer and the bright-blossomed turtlehead blooms in late summer.

Plant buyers can follow the signs from the north entrance to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln East Campus on 38th and Huntington/Leighton. A complete plant list is on the web at arboretum.unl.edu/plantsales.

Proceeds from the Fall Plant Sale sustain the Arboretum’s mission and fund critical programs and services. For more information about the NSA Plant Sale, contact Karma Larsen, Nebraska Forest Service, (402) 472-7923, klarsen1@unl.edu.