

# THE FAR-REACHING BENEFITS OF TREES

PLANT A TREE IN YOUR GARDEN TODAY AND MAKE YOUR WORLD A BETTER PLACE

*Written By Robyn Rochm Cannon*

**A**lbert Einstein once observed, “The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago—and the second-best time is now.” For being a nuclear physicist and not a landscape architect, he certainly had that theory right.

Einstein surely wasn't alone in his appreciation of trees and his understanding of their importance in our landscapes and our lives. Everyone loves to sit under the shady canopy of a mature

tree on a hot afternoon, and most of us have a sentimental connection to a tree that we played under, swung from, or climbed the limbs of during our childhood.

My early memories recall a massive triple-trunked mulberry tree, which shaded the entire front yard of my parents' St. Louis home. All summer long, my cousins and I collected its giant, deliciously sweet berries that stained our tongues purple. Much

later, when I was in high school and in a new house, I remember the twin white oaks that framed the front walk of my friend Ellen's yard, and how she, a proverbial tomboy, would delight in climbing the trees to sit and wait each morning for my Dad to take us to school and then jump down with a hoot and a flourish as she saw his car approaching. Recently, I passed those same oaks and realized that they are no longer easily scalable. In thirty-four years, their trunks have grown six feet higher—but I still visualize Ellen up there when I walk by.

a beautiful mature tree has been needlessly lost to disease or wind damage that could have been prevented by proper maintenance each season.

Bailey Nurseries, in St. Paul, Minnesota, recently announced home gardener access to its online image library at [www.baileynurseries.com](http://www.baileynurseries.com). Here, you can easily locate trees by name, height, habit, zone, bloom date, and exposure and quickly print all the information for future reference.

As you consider trees for your landscape, remember that

“THE NEED FOR A  
VARIETY OF TREES IN THE  
LANDSCAPE IS GREATER  
THAN EVER.”



In my own Seattle garden, a twenty-foot hearty Windmill Palm anchors one side of a hillside terrace. Its towering presence has inspired our Mediterranean landscape design, and my husband recalls the day—many years ago now—that he struggled to plant it at only six feet tall. Today, we sit under its arching fronds, sip margaritas, and pretend we live in the tropics; last season, we added two more palms to keep it company.

These days, the need for a variety of trees in the landscape is greater than ever as our cities expand, green spaces diminish, and air pollution increases. Emotions run high and citizen groups fight developers as legacy trees are sometimes sacrificed in the name of progress. But the good news is that more and more municipalities across the country are building new parks and making it a requirement of new construction to leave a site with more trees than may have been there in the first place. And though they are saplings today, these trees will bring shade, seasonal color, and beautiful variety to the gardens and public spaces of the future.

As a residential garden designer, I encourage you to plant the largest trees you can afford in your own space, bringing specimens in with a crane, if possible. Although that may seem an extravagant measure, consider the benefits. If your home is new, trees well on their way to maturity will contribute an air of permanence and scale to your landscape and bring you immediate pleasure in your garden. If you're living in an older home with an established landscape, seek out and work closely with a certified arborist to assist you with annual pruning and in protecting your trees' long-term health. Many

planting a tree has many far-reaching benefits beyond our own front yard. Here are just a few:

- Trees lower local air temperatures by transpiring water and shading surfaces. Because they lower air temperatures, shade buildings in the summer, and block winter winds, they reduce building energy use and cooling costs dramatically.
- Planting trees remains the cheapest, most-effective means of drawing excess carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the atmosphere. In one year, an average tree produces enough oxygen for a family of four and absorbs CO<sub>2</sub> output from four cars. If every American family planted just one tree, the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere would be reduced by one billion pounds annually—almost five percent of the amount that human activity pumps into the atmosphere each year.
- The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that with improvements in plant productivity and conversion efficiencies, 25 percent of U.S.-imported oil could be displaced by plantation-grown trees by 2050.

When Einstein noted that it's never too late to begin planting trees, he had no idea the challenges our society would someday face. But we can all make a difference. So find a tree that you love, get your shovel, and start digging. Your grandchildren—and your planet—will one day thank you for your contribution. ■