

Planning shade for your summer deck

By ANNE HARVEY

If you are baking in the sun on an exposed deck or terrace and are considering getting some 'green shade,' this is the best time to analyze where you need a tree, shrub or vine to shade your patio or help keep the house cool.

There are many choices, but be sure to check your weight limits. Well-watered big containers can weigh hundreds of pounds. Select a lightweight pot to reduce weight significantly.

Some maples, especially *Acer palmatum*, (Japanese maples) make lovely shade. From beautifully sculpted branches to lacy, intricate leaves to stunning fall colors of both leaves and bark, this tree truly offers four season interest. There are many varieties, so it shouldn't be too challenging to find one suited to your situation. Also, winter cold is not a problem for this species. But, if there is significant wind or reflective heat from a wall,

maples can burn and suffer.

Another favorite is *Styrax japonica*, a lovely, slow growing, vase-shaped, pest-free tree. This 'Japanese Snowbell' has delicate white blossoms in late spring that are a delight when viewed from a seat below.

Stewartias are a third favorite of mine. They have beautiful, velvety, bright-green leaves, lovely, camellia-like flowers in summer and fascinating peeling bark for winter interest; and no pests or diseases. There are many other trees easily grown in large containers. Contact your favorite nursery or the Cooperative Extension office if you would like more suggestions for your particular site and wishes.

Here are some tips in growing trees in containers:

Choose trees that are well-suited to the space and microclimate of your garden.

Measure to be sure the combined height and width of the tree and pot will actually fit

into your available space, and that the tree suits your style once it's in place.

Investigate trees that can tolerate restricted root zones and look in public places for trees that are grown in containers locally.

Get the whole names of trees you like. Different varieties of a particular tree will have different growth habits.

Also look for dwarf varieties of trees for container growing. Consider using two-gallon pots to grow dwarf citrus trees that will need winter protection; or, select small flowering trees or large shrubs and dwarf varieties of larger trees for pots in the midsize range. Check out full-size street trees to grow in large containers, up to 30 gallons.

Pick features you'll enjoy year-round in a container tree. The ideal evergreen, loaded with berries in winter, or the perfect deciduous tree for summer shade, flowers, leaves and perhaps fruit. If winter protection is something you could take in stride, consider tropical trees in containers for a festive flair.

Think of container tree growing as a matter of balance: tree-to-pot and top-to-roots. The tree you choose must balance its pot in size, style and texture, while still having room for roots in proportion to its top growth. The challenge for the small space gardener is to choose a tree that can establish its roots comfortably in the limited amount of potting soil in a container.

Contrary to what many people think, the majority of tree roots are as small as a thin piece of wire, are less than 2 inches long and grow mostly horizontally. Concentrated in the top few inches of the soil, these "feeder" roots have the job of absorbing most of the water and nutrients the tree takes up. When tree roots are damaged, there is such interdependency in the tree that an equivalent number of branches will eventually die. Be sure the container you choose can drain, or no tree will grow in it.

Small, dwarf and semi-dwarf tree varieties most easily adapt to container growing. Select a pot that is large enough to allow for root

expansion and to accommodate sufficient potting mixture to protect the roots from too hot or too cold temperatures. Before planting, loosen the soil around the root ball and lift the tree by the root ball, not by the trunk, into the new pot. Add a slow release fertilizer once a year.

I prefer to plant in September in years when I'm willing to pamper the new addition attentively or else I wait until October when it is cooler. This allows the tree sufficient time to get established before having to deal with our potentially cold January and February.

Make sure your container is clean (sterilize with 1 part bleach to 10 parts water) and large enough. Use a potting mixture, preferably an organic one, specifically designed for containers. With trees, you can add 5 to 10 percent of sterilized soil to the potting mixture to support the heavier plant and provide a more stable container. Do not use regular garden soil. It will not drain well enough and it likely contains weed seeds or other soil diseases.

Water appropriately for the needs of the specific tree. Containers tend to dry out more quickly than in-ground plantings.

However, don't over-water. Position the container so the tree gets the necessary light, depending on its requirements. Put it on a wheeled plant stand for easy movement and the ability to change positions on your deck or patio as light conditions change and to prevent rot if the deck surface is wood.

Container trees will provide a strong, vertical element in your garden. You can use their height to create dramatic emphasis among your smaller flower and foliage plants. Or group a number of potted trees together to form a grove. Matching potted trees can look elegant flanking a doorway or the entrance to a patio or deck.

Select a container that complements the shape and color of the tree. Adding a tree to your container garden will offer several benefits: shade, privacy, a dramatic focal point, rich autumn colors, a buffer for wind, and simple poetic pleasure. So, settle back with another iced tea and visualize your perfect tree.

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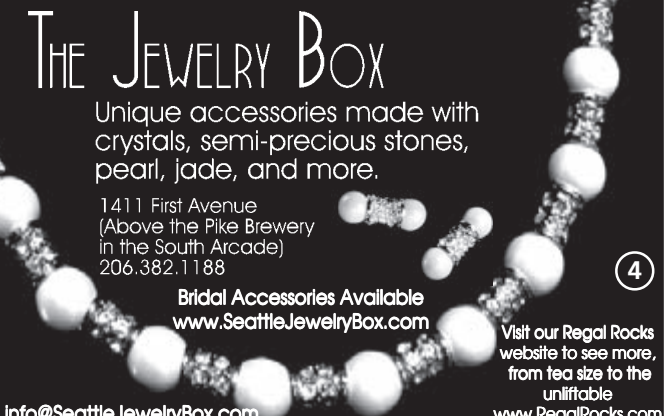
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