

Garden Column
August 14, 2016
Trees for northern Minnesota
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Trees were objects of worship to prehistoric humans. The Druids venerated trees. They were enthralled by the mystery of their growth, the movement of their leaves and branches, the way they seem to die and come back to life in the spring; and the sudden growth of the plant from the seed. Trees define the landscape. A prairie has few or no trees, a forest is comprised of trees. And, trees give us two of our most important assets, books and oxygen. Abraham Lincoln said, "Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing."

The storms this summer blew down countless trees in northern Minnesota forests, some under tragic circumstances. Perhaps trees were blown down or broken in your yard and now there's a hole where that tree once stood. This is the time to replace the downed or broken tree(s) with a new one from Bloomers.

Think about a Meyer spruce also named Chinese blue spruce. This tree is an excellent choice for USDA Zone 3. It will grow to a height of about 40 feet and has short blue-green needles. It's pyramidal form, bluish-green foliage, excellent needle retention, smooth gray bark, and disease resistance makes it an ideal ornamental tree.

The tree should be grown in full sunlight and is adaptable to both dry and moist growing conditions but will not tolerate standing water. It is considered to be drought tolerant so it should do well during dry summers. It is considered to be a slow growing tree but is expected to live 80 years or more. The tree is not fussy about soil type, is tolerant of urban pollution and will even thrive in an inner city environment. A very positive trait for this tree is deer don't particularly care for it and will "usually" leave it alone in favor of tastier goodies. As far as is known, the Meyers spruce has no significant negative characteristics. In other words, it's an ideal tree for northern Minnesota.

A favorite evergreen is the Norway spruce, a name very fitting to northern Minnesota culture. The droopy branches with their rich green needles makes the tree very appealing. It's a tough, hardy tree that is suitable for windbreaks, growing to 60 feet with a spread of 25 to 30 feet.

The tree has a strong central leader and a distinctive pyramidal form. Some references refer to it as a "refined" shape. The bark tends to be smooth and

gray in color. Like Meyer spruce, deer do not find Norway spruce very tasty and

normally leave it alone. It has no significant negative characteristics.

An interesting tree that is winter hardy to zone 2 is the Amur maple. This beautiful tree is among the hardiest of all maples and is kind of a roly-poly representative of the tree kingdom with a height and spread of about 20 feet. Amur maple has dark green foliage throughout the season and the leaves tend to be lobed. One of its' most positive features is the incredible fall colors that range from orange, scarlet, to burgundy red. It is a "clean" tree that forms colorful samaras (seeds that are popularly called whirlybirds, spinners or helicopters) in late summer.

Amur maples grow best in full sun to partial shade. It is very adaptable to both dry and wet locations and should do fine under average home landscape conditions. It will grow in most soil types regardless of soil pH. It is very tolerant of urban pollution and should do well in "town".

Another maple to think about is the red maple. At maturity it reaches a height of 40 to 100 feet and will grow in different soils from sandy to clay. It thrives across a wide variety of climatic conditions but is somewhat intolerant to soil pH's above 6.5 where manganese deficiencies occur resulting in chlorosis. In autumn the foliage turns a brilliant red, orange, or yellow. Different cultivars exist and Bloomers carry the Northwood and Burgundy Belle cultivars.

Another maple to consider is the Autumn Blaze maple, an excellent alternative for areas where the red maples may not grow well. This tree grows to a height of 50 feet and is a hybrid between silver and red maples. This tree also has stunning fall colors, turning an outstanding red in the fall after a summer of vivid green foliage. In the early spring it has showy red flowers before it leafs out. This is a tough tree that does not require any maintenance and even thrives under urban conditions.

One of the most beautiful trees for our area is the river birch, sometimes called the "red birch" because of the red hues of its' peeling bark. On a personal note, my mother passed away several years ago. We wanted to have a living memorial to her and purchased a river birch from Bloomers. Today that tree is affectionately known as "Gertrude" and is growing beautifully.

River birches will grow to 60 feet tall under good growing conditions. It is a rapidly growing tree that can be expected to live for 70 years or more. The bark peeling from mature trunks is stunning with a mix of white, brown, and tan colors. The peeling bark, with its' different hues, adds interest to a monochromatic winter landscape. The foliage is a dark green throughout the summer and the "pointy" leaves turn a beautiful yellow in the fall. River birches will grow in many soil types but require an acid soil, being susceptible

to iron chlorosis (yellowing of the leaves) in alkaline soils. The tree does best in full sun to partial shade and is quite adaptable, preferring to grow in average to wet conditions. It will tolerate some standing water. It is highly tolerant of urban pollution and even thrives in inner city environments. Consider applying a thick mulch around the root zone in winter to protect it in exposed locations or in colder zones.

Remember, “Acts of creation are ordinarily reserved for gods and poets. To plant a tree, one need only own a shovel” – Aldo Leopold