Archive for November, 2008

Right Tree, Right Place – Planning Ahead
Sunday, November 2nd, 2008

There are many sources of information out there to help you decide what kind of tree ought to be growing in what place on your property. As part of your planning ahead process, I recommend you look into at least one of these references (please!!!!!!!!!!!!!) before you head down to the parking lot garden center to buy trees next spring:

1. Fazio, James R. 2004. The Right Tree For The Right Place. Tree City USA Bulletin No. 4. The National Arbor Day Foundation. 100 Arbor Ave. Nebraska City, NE 68410. Cost: $3.00.
The Tree City USA Bulletin Series is one of the best references for a number of urban tree care practices, and this one is no exception. There is a cost involved, but it's well worth the three bucks. better yet, join the National Arbor Day Foundation and get the whole series as part of your membership. Check it out on their website: www.arborday.org.

2. Shrock, Denny. Developing The Landscape Plan. Access at: http://extension. missouri.edu/explore/agguides/hort/g06901.htm. This is a concise guidesheet to developing a residential landscape plan drawing.

3. Kansas City Power & Light. A 19 pp document in pdf format that provides guidance in avoiding future problems between trees and utility lines. Access at: http://www.kcpl.com/brochures/righttree.pdf.

4. Then there's a good book for winter reading: Residential Landscape Architecture: Design Process for the private Residence, by Norman Booth and James Hiss. It's the 4th edition and is printed by Prentice Hall. 496 pp. (Wow! Almost 500 pp. on planning ahead!).

These references should tell you all you need to know about planning ahead for next spring.

Good Luck.

Avoiding Tree/Utility Lines Conflicts
Saturday, November 8th, 2008

One of the most difficult problems we have with establishing trees in urban areas, is avoiding conflicts with utility lines; particularly overhead lines. Tree limbs in utility lines cause all kinds of problems, for both the homeowner and the utility company. Much of the damage done to larger trees by crews maintaining utility rights of way is a result of the wrong tree in the wrong place to begin with. Much of the tree topping that is done occurs to the trees located in the wrong place along a utility line.

Many landowners blame the utility company for damaging "their" tree(s), even though the tree may be growing on the company's right of way. Most companies don't want to damage trees, especially if the homeowner is one of their customers, but, because the tree has become a problem, the company must deal with it in order to assure that electricity keeps flowing at all times. In fact, utilities are required by one regulatory agency or another (and even by law) to maintain their transmission lines in certain ways; ways that often conflict with what a homeowner may want. But, I have found that there is one thing that almost every homeowner hates worse than "their" tree being damaged by the power company: and that is being

without electrical service because of damage caused by falling trees or limbs during a storm. Most of us cannot stand being without power for even a short time.

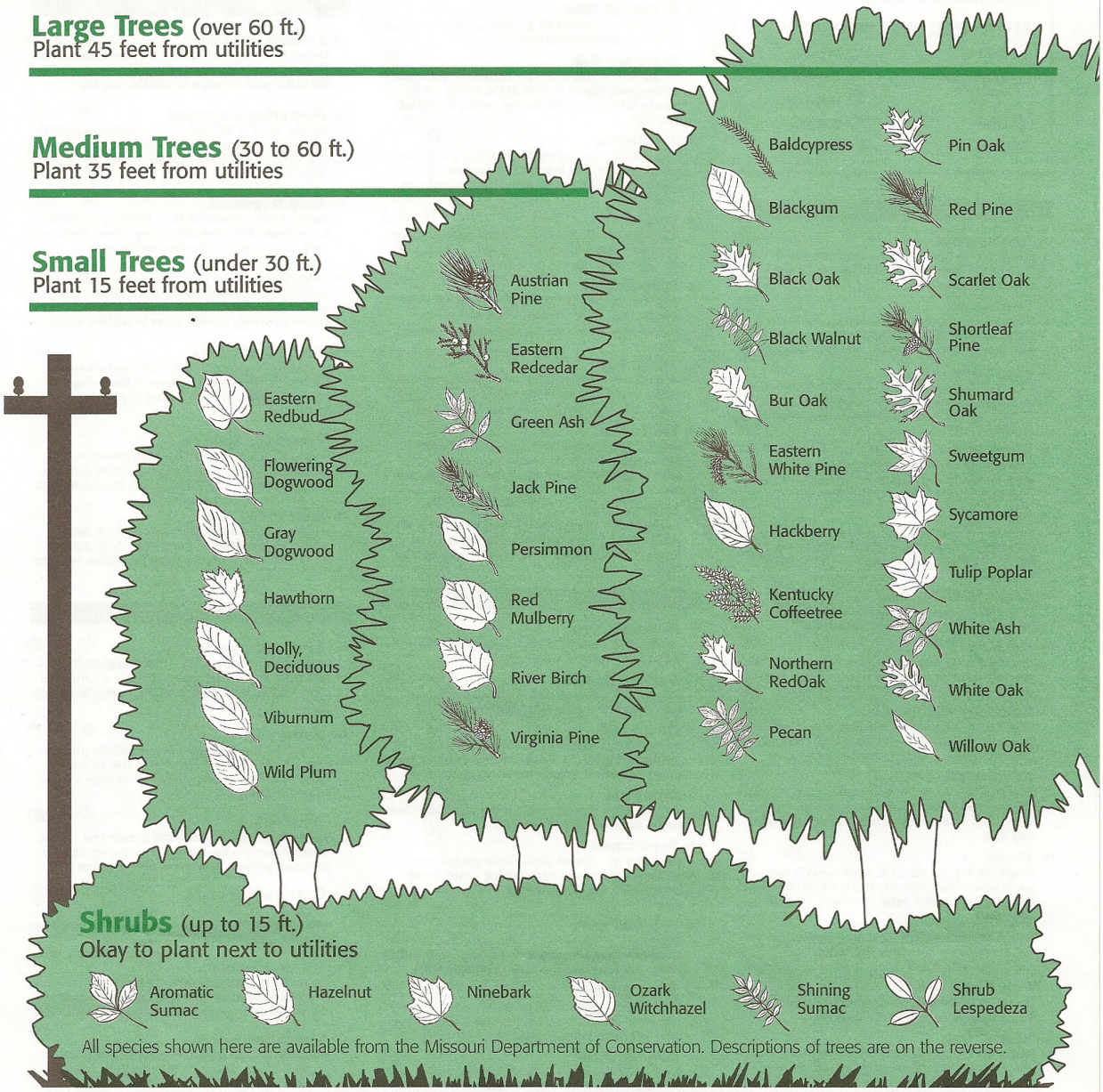
The best way to deal with tree and utility line conflicts is to plant the right tree in the right place right from the start; thus avoiding the problem(s). If this advice is followed, everyone wins; the utility avoids making customers unhappy, the homeowner (and their neighbors) will not have to endure as many electrical outages, and the trees will continue to be an asset to the home and neighborhood because they will not be damaged during the line maintenance process.

Help for the homeowner is available from many sources pertaining to this subject. Start by contacting your utility company and asking what they can do to help you avoid tree/line conflicts. Many companies have programs available to do just that, and some even have programs that provide free planting stock and/or cost share dollars to purchase the "right" tree. The Missouri Department of Conservation has urban foresters stationed at most regional offices, and they provide free advisory services and information to help you plan the plantings around your home. The Department can be reached at their website: www.mdc.mo.gov. Other sources of help (for a fee) are available through local arborists, landscaping consultants, and nurseries. Check out the phone book for listings of such businesses in your area.

The following illustration is provided for consideration to aid in planning for next springs tree planting. It is fairly general, but offers some broad guidance that should get you started. I hope it's helpful.

The Right Tree in the Right Place

Trees should be planted away from utility lines, poles and underground utilities at the indicated distances.



All species shown here are available from the Missouri Department of Conservation. Descriptions of trees are on the reverse.

I Won't Live Long Enough To Worry About It
Monday, November 17th, 2008

One of the most common explanations I've run across, from a person planting the wrong tree species or planting a tree in the wrong place, is this, " It doesn't matter, I won't live long enough to worry about it." I always get the impression that these type folks either don't expect to live very long, or don't believe that trees can grow very fast. They definitely don't have much consideration for future owners of their property. I could understand their attitude, if they were uninformed about their species selection and/or the limitations of the place where they want to plant that particular tree. Uninformed people make mistakes every day, about lots of things. I've done it myself.

However, most of the folks who use the excuse noted above, do so after they have been informed by knowledgeable people, and even after being advised as to the proper action they should take to accomplish their need to plant a tree, or trees, around their home site.

I once had an aquaintance ask me what he should plant in a certain spot near his house. I looked it over and realized he didn't really have much room for a large tree to develop there, so I recommended a dogwood or redbud, or some other species that wouldn't "outgrow" the spot. I tried to explain all the ramifications of right tree in the right place, and actually recommended that he consider some sort of shrub, if he really *needed*some kind of perennial plant in that spot. He thanked me for my time and advice, and I went along my way thinking I had done my good deed for the day.

About a week later, I saw my friend planting a tree in "the spot," so I stopped to observe his technique. It was good, but **he was planting a pin oak!** in a spot that would barely hold a redbud when the tree matured. When I asked him why he was planting a pin oak, he said, "my wife always wanted a pin oak." I reiterated the limitations of the spot, and he gave me "the excuse" : I'll be gone before it causes any problems. Guess what? 8 years later he was still around, and the pin oak was beating up on his siding and had broken an outdoor light fixture. What to do? Cut it down and replace it with a shrub. " I can't do that, it's my wife's pin oak." I went on my way.

Examples like this abound. A fellow forester once recommended a redbud or dogwood to his father-in-law for a spot in his postage stamp sized backyard in St. Louis. When my colleague returned, there stood a pin oak. Why had his in-law planted it? It was on sale, and besides he wouldn't live long enough to worry about it. He's still alive, and the tree dominates three backyards after 30 years.

Many lay people believe that trees don't grow very fast. In some cases that is true, especially where they experience poor soil conditions or other adverse circumstances (drought, fire damage, etc.). However, many species of trees can survive and grow well in a variety of urban settings, if they are given half a chance, and can become quite larger than their rural woodland counterparts in the same amount of time, due to less competition from other species.

So, when planning for the right tree in the right place, take into account that you will probably live long enough to worry about it, and let that temper your thoughts about where to plant that favorite tree. In addition, it will make your property more desirable to a prospective future owner (and more valuable to you).

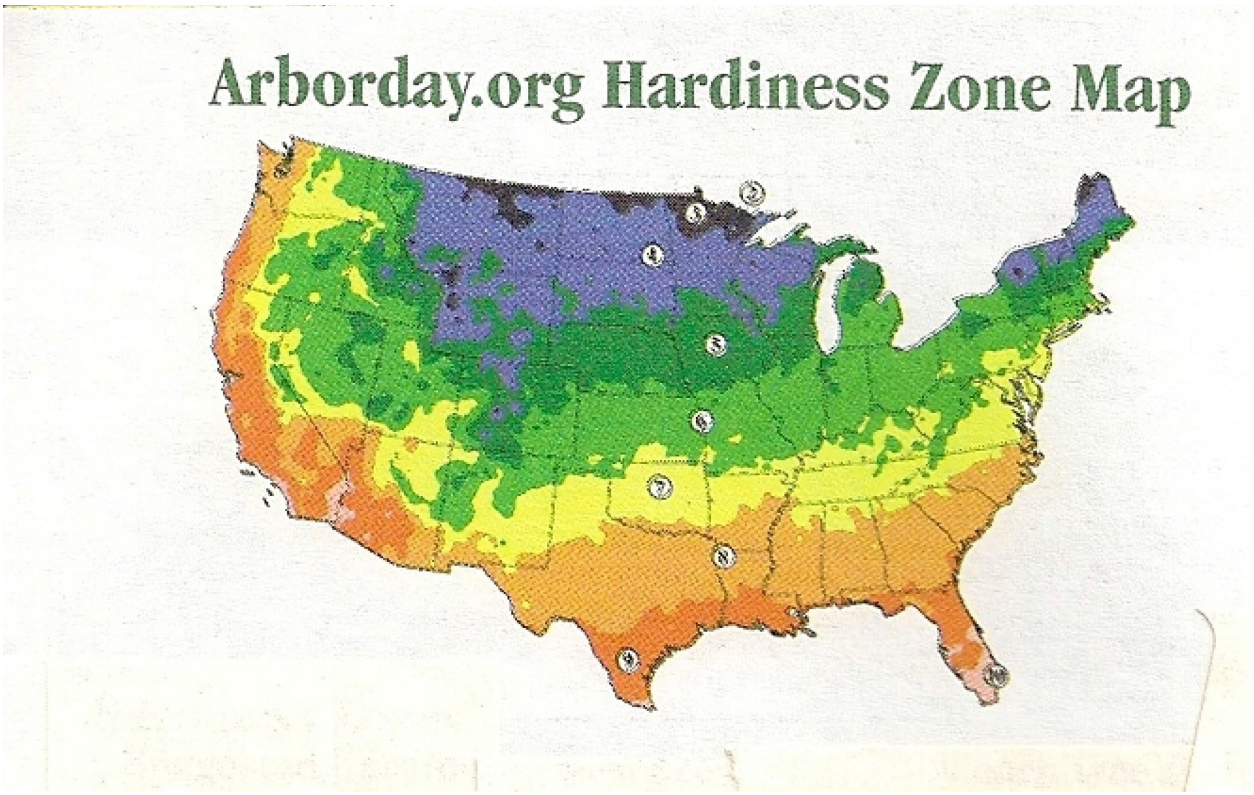
Plant Hardiness Zones
Saturday, November 22nd, 2008

I suspect that everyone has a favorite tree species. As a forester, I work with all sorts of species, so I have several favorites, most of which are native and suitable for planting in Missouri. Northern red oak, white oak, swamp white oak, yellow-poplar, eastern redcedar, and shortleaf pine are particular favorites, as is the venerable eastern black walnut. However, I have some favorite species that I have seen in other places, but are not native to our state. Eastern hemlock is one of those species, as are many of the western mountain species: such as douglas fir, ponderosa pine, sugar pine, and port orford cedar. Coastal redwood also sits right near the top with me.

I would love to see some of my favorite non-natives planted in Missouri, but I know most of them will not do well here, except in isolated situations. So, we try to stick with the natives for best results when planting around our homes and communities. Believe me, we have plenty of good choices among our local tree gentry.

To help with proper species selection plant hardiness zones have been established. These zones are based on the most recently compiled average annual temperatures recorded by U.S. weather stations. Suitable hardiness means a plant can be expected to grow in the zone's temperature extremes. However, local variations such as moisture , soil, winds, and other conditions might affect the viability of individual plants. In addition, it is somewhat safer to move a plant from north to south (and vice versa) than from west to east, or east to west, within a hardiness zone. Moving plants from east to west in Missouri can be particularly tricky since west is where the prairie starts, and many tree species don't do well out in the "wide open spaces."

Presented below is a plant hardiness zone map prepared by the National Arbor Day Foundation. Missouri is generally in one zone, but the very northern and very southern parts of the state are within zones more common to the north and south (respectively) of the state. Please note that the hardiness zone for Missouri extends into the western Rocky Mountains, but that doesn't mean I can get my favorites from there and have them do well here in Missouri. Other limiting factors besides temperature extremes come into play to prevent that. However, the plant hardiness map presents a good place start when planning what tree species one might want to plant.



Dirt
Friday, November 28th, 2008

The most overlooked factor (by most people) when deciding what and where to plant a tree in an urban setting, is the soil. Many urban soils have been disturbed by so many things (compaction, construction, etc.) that their basic physical structure and chemical makeup no longer resembles the soil that was originally there. Unfortunately, a home owner must work with what is available, and what is available can make the difference between success or failure after planting.

For a tree to be healthy and able to reach its full potential, the root system must be able to adequately support the above ground part of the tree. In general, a healthy tree will have a volume of roots that is approximately equal to the volume of the stem, branches, and twigs. This is called the *root to shoot ratio*, and is essentially 1:1 in a healthy tree.

To attain a healthy root/shoot ratio, a tree needs to be growing in good dirt. Deep rooted species will need adequate depth for their structural roots, whereas shallow rooted species may do all right on sites where soils thinly cover bedrock or a hard layer of clay. Species that do well in sandy or loam soils should not be planted in rocky or clay type soils. Most species do not fare well in heavily compacted or disturbed soils, nor do they do very well where there is an unfavorable acidic balance (too low pH or too high pH).

Matching the right tree to the right place should begin with the soil. Professional help will be needed by most landowners, in order to determine what the specific conditions are on their planting site(s). A forester or arborist can advise them about how to obtain the information needed, or one may talk with the local county USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Office, University of Missouri Extension

Office, or even some local plant nurseries/garden centers who offer soil analysis services and/or assistance.

The lowdown on dirt (no pun intended) is to find out as much as you can before selecting a species to plant. Doing so will save trouble and expense, in the future, and should help your tree(s) become the valuable asset that you have in mind.