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Bargains

Tuesday, March 9th, 2010

Everyone loves a bargain. Getting something at a lower cost than we expected thrills us, and makes us think that we are truly shrewd shoppers/buyers etc. Unfortunately, too many folks equate “buying on the cheap” with getting a bargain. Just because something is cheaper at one place than it is at another, doesn’t make it a bargain, unless it is the exact same in quantity, quality, and functionality.

My dad was a truck mechanic, and he always said to beware of a grease monkey who agreed to work too cheap, because he probably wasn’t any good and did a shoddy job, which cost you more to overcome in the long run, than it would to pay fair value for better service up front. I have found this to be good advice through the years, and I don’t worry nearly as much as I used to when I see an hourly rate charged by a competent tradesman “to do a job I won’t or can’t do,” that looks “expensive.” After all, I never worked on the cheap either, and always felt my hourly rate was fair for what I did.

This same philosophy applies to buying plant materials, and, as the spring planting season approaches, I urge you to beware of bargain prices for tree planting stock. No matter the price, you still need to follow the guidelines for selecting good trees for planting:

1. Is it the right species for your area, and for the spot where you want to plant it? Will it function as desired?
2. Has the root system been properly protected during the lifting process, or during it’s stay in a container if that is the way it is offered for sale? Root systems that have outgrown a container should be avoided, for example.
3. No matter the way a plant is presented, be sure that it has these desirable characteristics:
 - a. Long, vigorous branches on current years growth, with well developed buds.
 - b. Pleasing proportion of height to spread.
 - c. Well developed lateral branches.
 - d. A straight trunk with an absence of wounds.
 - e. Firm, moist root ball, or container soil.

In general, buying stocks from a certified nurseryman will get you the quality you need for the price you pay. You may find a “special” now and then, but beware of plants that are priced too cheap, unless they have the desirable characteristics noted above. Starting with the best quality stock you can find and afford is the best way to have a successful result when adding trees to the landscape.

Thinking About Trees

Sunday, March 21st, 2010

I recently had surgery to repair a torn rotator cuff in my left shoulder. I have been rehabbing for about two weeks now, and have been limited in what I can do, but I can still think about stuff, and work my computer. In addition, winter is not losing much of it’s grip, so far, so it’s a good time to think and plan about what I’m going to do when my shoulder gets back into a useable condition. Of course, proper tree care is always on my mind, so I am planning what to take care of as soon as I can.

I won't be planting any trees this spring, and it will be late June before I can do other things with the trees in my yard, but the tree care advice can continue flowing through the forum in this blog. Therefore I can be a happy camper for a while.

Thinking and planning ahead can be a tedious and frustrating exercise for many folks, but I know from experience that much time, energy, and expense can be saved, if one takes the time to plan out a strategy to deal with the tree care needs/wants that you have for your home landscape. Good planning can help to allocate your time to the highest priorities, which allows for a better job, and thus a better chance for success. Planning can also aid in deciding just what is the most important thing to do, as well as helping you decide what the proper timing should be.

So, if you haven't done so already, get that skullcap on and do some serious thinking **and planning** about this spring's activities, because, even though spring sprung (officially) last Friday, this last (maybe) wintry blast won't last much longer, and spring will come on like gangbusters.

I just wish I didn't have so much time left to do my planning.

Be careful out there.