ENH22

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

IFAS EXTENSION

Ornamental Trees for South Florida [1]

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Trees are an indispensable part of the landscape. They give a home, street, or commercial site individuality, beauty, and tranquillity. Because of their long life, trees give the surroundings a sense of permanence and stability.

Trees are vital in combating environmental pollution. They help keep the air supply fresh by trapping and filtering dust, removing carbon dioxide, and at the same time releasing oxygen. Trees reduce noise pollution by acting as barriers to sound, lower temperatures by shading and through evaporation of water from their leaves, and reduce soil erosion. Trees can camouflage harsh scenery such as city dumps, auto graveyards, and industrial sites. Furthermore, trees beautify our gardens, streets, and parks and please our senses with interesting shapes, patterns, colors, scents, and seasonal changes. Every homesite should include several ornamental trees.

Selection of a Tree

Tree selection is mainly a question of personal preference. However, the species should be well adapted to the site and satisfy the purpose for which it is intended. In Florida, the number and variety of trees are so great that the choice is not always simple. Table 1 lists information about desirable trees for southern Florida. Trees listed are some of the best choices for home landscaping, and all have proven suitable for planting in southern Florida. No attempt has been made to include all trees that can be grown in south Florida.

Planting Trees

Because of better developed and more compact root systems, nursery-grown trees are easier to transplant and grow more successfully than those taken from the woods. It is impractical when moving wild plants to dig and move more than a small portion of the root system, and without an adequate root system the tree may die after transplanting. The best place to purchase a tree is from a reputable nursery. Container-grown trees can be planted any time of the year. The nursery will be able to provide information on where and how to plant the tree selected.

Follow the steps below when planting a tree:

1. Have a nursery salesperson cut the container so that the tree can be easily removed.
2. Make the hole two to three times as wide as the container the tree is in.

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3. Make the hole no deeper than the height of the root ball.

4. Gently place the tree straight in the hole and be sure that the root ball is not deeper than the existing landscape soil surface. Fill around the ball with soil and gently firm the soil. Water thoroughly while planting to remove any air pockets.

5. Form a basin around the edge of the root ball with a soil ridge 3-6 inches high to facilitate watering.

6. Mulch with a 2- to 3-inch layer of organic material to buffer soil temperature, conserve moisture, and reduce weed competition.

7. If needed, support the tree by staking or guying.

8. Water the tree daily for 1-2 months, then 3 times a week for 2 months, then weekly until established.

9. Fertilize 4 to 6 weeks after planting with a slow-release fertilizer on the surface of the root ball and the backfill soil.

Fertilizing

Fertilization is usually desirable when we are trying to get newly planted trees established. We normally want the new tree to get off to a quick start and grow rapidly so that it will fill the planted area. When this is the case, fertilize about 4 to 6 weeks after planting and then 2 to 3 times per year for the following 3 years. Two of the annual applications are normally scheduled around February and October for south Florida, and March and September for north Florida. A third application can be made during the summer. Once trees are established (3 to 5 years after transplanting), they will not need additional fertilizer if they are growing in a landscape where turf and shrubs are fertilized.

A complete fertilizer with a ratio of approximately 3:1:2 or 3:1:3 (e.g. 12-4-8 or 15-5-15) is generally recommended. Similar analysis fertilizers such as 16-4-8 (4:1:2) can also be used.

Fertilizers that are slow release, controlled release, sulfur coated or with nitrogen such as isobutylidene diurea or ureaformaldehyde have extended-release periods compared to fertilizers that are readily water soluble. Thirty to fifty percent of the nitrogen should be water insoluble or slow release so that plant roots can absorb the nitrogen over a long period of time. A fertilizer containing thirty to fifty percent slow-release potassium should be used in south Florida or where soil potassium is frequently inadequate.

The amount of fertilizer to apply to trees can be determined by calculating the area under the trees and then applying fertilizer at the rate of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet of area.

Fertilizer placement in relation to the tree root zone is very important. Fertilizer should be applied to the surface of the mulched and unmulched areas around a tree out to a distance no more than one and a half to two times the canopy diameter. If the turf was fertilized within the two preceding weeks, do not apply additional fertilizer to the turf area around the tree.

Table 1. Ornamental Trees for South Florida

Common Name *Scientific Name*	Type of tree[1]	Height	Flower color Flower season	Soil Adaptability[2]	Salt spray tol.[3]	How Trees Are Used						
						Accent or Specimen	Border planting	Framing	Patio	Roadside & Street	Seaside	Shade
Avocado *Persea americana*	BLEV.	50-75 feet	Greenish Winter	Fert., well-drained	N	X						
Remarks: Beautiful, large-leaved tree; good edible fruit, if proper varieties planted.												
Black olive *Bucida buceras*	BLEV.	40-50 feet	Greenish-yellow Spring	Any	M			X		X	X	X
Remarks: Very wind resistant; beautiful street tree.												
Bottle brush *Callistemon citrinus (lanceolatus)*	BLEV.	20 feet	Red Spring, summer	Avg.	M	X	X		X		X	
Remarks: Widely used as a specimen; large shrub or small tree.												
Buttonwood *Conocarpus erectus*	BLEV.	60 feet	Greenish-purple Yearly	Moist	H	X		X			X	
Remarks: Silver-leafed variety most attractive.												
Calamondin, orange, etc.; *Citrus* spp.	BLEV.	var 10-40 feet	White Spring	Fert. & well-drained	L	X		X				X
Remarks: High fertilizer requirement. Pest problems serious.												
Eucalyptus *Eucalyptus* spp.	BLEV.	30-60 feet	Variable Summer	Avg. to dry	L-H	X		X	X	X	X	X
Remarks: Rapid-growing; many species to choose; some brittle.												
Fig *Ficus* spp.	BLEV.	40-100 feet	Inconspicuous	Any	M	X		X	X	X	X	X
Remarks: Dense shade from most species; many very large, use on large lots. *Ficus microcarpa* (laurel fig) is invasive.												
Frangipani *Plumeria* spp.	Decid.	35 feet	Pink, purple, red, white & yellow Summer	Well-drained	M	X	X			X		X
Remarks: Beautiful, flowering tree; red, white yellow, and pink varieties.												

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Geiger tree *Cordia sebestena*	BLEV.	25 feet	Orange, red Yearly	Avg.	H	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Remarks: Beautiful orange-red flowers and dark green, rough leaves.												
Gumbo-limbo *Bursera simaruba*	Decid.	60 feet	Greenish Winter, spring	Moist to Avg.	M	X	X			X	X	
Remarks: Will grow from a limb stuck in the ground; very ornamental bark and limb structure.												
Jacaranda *Jacaranda mimosifolia*	Semi-ev.	50 feet	Lavender to blue Late Spring, early summer	Avg. to sandy	N			X	X	X		X
Remarks: Recovers rapidly from frost injury; somewhat messy; too large for small lots.												
Jerusalem thorn *Parkinsonia aculeata*	Decid.	30 feet	Yellow Spring	Any well-drained	L	X	X					
Remarks: Tolerates neglect; beautiful, small, flowering tree.												
Loquat *Eriobotrya japonica*	BLEV.	25 feet	White Late Fall	Average	L	X	X		X			
Remarks: Excellent, edible fruit; called Japanese plum.												
Lychee *Litchi chinensis*	BLEV.	40 feet	Greenish-white Spring	Sandy	N	X		X				X
Remarks: Glossy, evergreen leaves; edible, bright red fruits.												
Mahogany *Swietenia mahogani*	BLEV.	50 feet	Greenish Spring	Avg.	M			X		X	X	X
Remarks: Excellent street and shade tree.												
Mango *Mangifera indica*	BLEV.	50 feet	Cream to red Dec. - April	Fert. & well-drained	N	X						X
Remarks: New foliage wine-colored; edible fruit, some people allergic to mango.												

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Norfolk Island pine *Araucaria heterophylla*	Conifer	100 feet	Inconspicuous	Avg.	H	X			X		X	
Remarks: Useful as a tub specimen on patio; good house plant.												
Oaks *Quercus* spp.	BLEV.	60-100 feet	Inconspicuous	Well-drained	H	X		X		X	X	X
Remarks: Live oaks have high salt tolerance.												
Orchid tree *Bauhinia* spp.	Semi-ev.	20-30 feet	Purple to white Yearly	Avg.	N	X	X	X	X			
Remarks: Different species bloom at different seasons; some near ever-blooming. *Bauhinia variegata* is invasive.												
Peltophorum (yellow poinciana) *Peltophorum pterocarpum*	Decid.	30-40 feet	Bright yellow Summer	Any well-drained	L	X				X		X
Remarks *Peltophorum dubium* also found in FL; differs only in leaflet size and number.												
Pongam *Pongamia pinnata*	BLEV.	45-75 feet	White to Pink	Avg.	H		X			X	X	x
Remarks: Wind resistant; used often as street and shade trees.												
Royal poinciana *Delonix regia*	Decid.	40 feet	Scarlet Early Summer	Any	L	X	X					
Remarks: Rapid-growing; beautiful, flowering tree; too large for small lots.												
Sea-grape *Coccoloba uvifera*	BLEV.	20 feet	Purple Summer	Any	H			X	X		X	
Remarks: Gives tropical appearance near sea; large leaves and clusters of grape-like fruit.												
Shower trees *Cassia* spp.	Semi-ev.	30-50 feet	Many colors	Avg	L	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Remarks: Selection of different species will give steady bloom.												

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						Accent or Specimen	**Border planting**	**Framing**	**Patio**	**Roadside & Street**	**Seaside**	**Shade**
Trumpet trees *Tabebuia* spp.	Decid.	40 feet	Pink, yellow, purple Winter & early spring	Avg.	M	X	X		X	X		
Remarks: Excellent flowering tree; interesting bark and forms.												
Wax mrytle *Myrica cerifera*	BLEV.	20-30 feet	Inconspicuous	Any	M	X	X	X		X	X	X
Remarks: An excellent, small, evergreen shrub or small tree.												
Weeping podocarpus *Podocarpus gracilior*	Conifer	50-70 feet	Inconspicuous	Any	M	X	X		X			
Remarks: Narrow foliage held by gracefully drooping branches.												
[1] Type of tree: **BLEV** - Broad Leaved Evergreen, in leaf year around; **Semi-Ev.** - Semi-Evergreen, leafless for only a short period; **Decid.** - Deciduous, without leaves during part of the year; **Conifer** - Evergreen, but narrow leaved												
[2] Soil Adaptability: Soil type for best growth: **Avg.** = Average; **Fet.** = Fertile												
[3] Salt spray tolerance: H - high, may be used in exposed areas near shore line; M - moderate, if near shore must be protected; L - Low, must be used in well protected areas back from shore; N - No salt tolerance or salt tolerance unknown												