

DRAFT of Shade Tree Commission Article For The Fall/Winter 2012 *Metuchen Messenger*

With the drying heat from the summer sun changing to the cooler temperatures of fall and winter, we can look forward to a new window of opportunity to plant new trees: up until late December in our area. The young trees' roots need time to become established before the ground becomes hard with the plunging temperatures of deep winter.

As trees mature, they can occupy considerable space, so planning for its mature size is required. With a bit of research in selecting the best tree for your chosen site, both you and your neighbors benefit, as you can enhance your property in many ways without infringing on the rights and privileges of your neighbors. For the coming winter planting, consider these points:

- The branches of deciduous trees, which lose their leaves in winter, filter winter sunlight, thereby maximizing solar heating;
- Planting trees on the north or northwest of your home can minimize the cooling of your home from strong winter winds;
- Evergreens planted on that cold north or northwest side of your home provide not only a privacy screen and a haven for wildlife but further reduce heating costs during winter as their bulkier shapes impede the cold winds. The most effective windbreaks, as in staggered rows of mature evergreens, can reduce wind velocity by as much as 40% to 50%.
- Small trees planted near your home's foundation also break the wind and provide additional insulation by trapping a layer of air next to your home that buffers the effect of outside air temperatures on indoor heating. Allow *at least* a one-foot clearance between the exterior of your home and the mature size your small tree or shrub will grow to; this provides for future maintenance and prevents damp, stagnant conditions which can damage both your wall and your plantings.
- Choose your new tree by first collecting your planned *site information*: the soil quality (i.e., acidity level, clay type or very moist), available level of sunlight in summer and winter, and your potential benefits from it as it grows. For example, deciduous trees reduce cooling costs in summer when planted on the west and southwest of your home, and as mentioned above, rows of evergreens can reduce heating costs by blocking the freezing winds.
- Consider the fall foliage beauty to come, the ornamental appeal of flowering trees in spring and the abundance of fruit in the summer or fall from fruit trees. Many birds appreciate fall fruits, seeds and nuts, as well as berries in the summer.
- According to the USDA Hardiness-Zone Map, Metuchen is in **hardiness zone range from 6b to 7a**; this map interprets *average annual minimum temperatures* (a range from -5 to 5 degrees in winter in Middlesex County).

CAUTION: Certain trees are not recommended for transplanting in the fall and are listed as **Fall Transplant Hazards**. The Fall Transplant Hazards list, at wefindplants.com, has some maples, dogwood, holly, oaks, pear and redbud on it, among others.

After your site and tree selection, dig the hole for your new tree to cover the full root ball and wide enough to allow for easy proliferation of the roots in the loosened soil. Water deeply – newly transplanted trees can become desiccated in dry, cold winds - and cover with a generous layer of mulch to keep moisture in. Carve out the area immediately surrounding the trunk to avoid rot. The trunk requires air circulation just above the root ball.

By matching your right tree to the right location, your new tree will thrive and grow and show best, adding beauty, protection, natural balance and cost cutting to your property and home in all seasons.

Come visit members of The Shade Tree Commission at our booth at the upcoming Country Fair on Saturday, October 6! There will be children's activities and tree information available.