

Trees to consider for Florida landscapes

Over fifty percent of all the tree species that grow in North America are found in Florida. We have a great wealth of trees from which to choose. Even though some of the trees mentioned in this article are poorly available in the nursery trade, they are worth considering for our North Florida landscapes.

Crape myrtles consistently flower during late spring, summer and even into fall. Flower color varies from lavender, pink, purple, red to pure white, depending on variety. They provide good to excellent fall color as their leaves turn from green to shades of orange and red. And even their smooth branches and exfoliating bark provide ornamental value during the winter months when they are bare of leaves.

Blackgum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) is an underused native tree. It's not for every landscape and it may be difficult to find in the nursery trade but it should be used more often in our landscapes. It's a large tree with a mature height of 75 feet with a 35 foot spread. It provides a brilliant display of red to deep purple foliage in the fall. The black gum can tolerate wet or dry sites but prefers moist areas. It is somewhat salt-tolerant, has a strong branch structure and is rarely attacked by pests.

Another underused native tree that deserves consideration is American hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*). This small to medium size tree can grow to 50 feet in height but more realistically will reach a height of 25 to 40 feet. This rugged tree will tolerate drought and needs little care once established. Hophornbeam is an attractive shade tolerant tree that should be used more often but it may be difficult to find.

The nuttall oak (*Quercus nuttallii*) is a large maturing shade tree native to North America. It can grow to 120 feet in height. But it is more often seen at 60 to 80 feet with a 35 to 50 foot spread. The deeply lobed deciduous leaves provide decent fall color for an oak. This outstanding shade tree is a good choice for urban areas but it will need room to grow.

One final group that I'll mention is the compact cultivars of Southern magnolias (*Magnolia grandiflora*). There are many cultivars to look for with new ones becoming available almost yearly. Cultivars such as 'Little Gem' and 'Glen St. Mary' have a compact form as compared to the standard Southern magnolia. They are more appropriate for smaller landscapes. These compact forms have another nice surprise—they will bloom when young. Some produce flowers when only two to three years old. It may take the standard Southern magnolia 10 to 20 years to flower.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, August 10, 2011

