

10 DISTINCTIVE TREES TO PLANT

Add Beauty to Yards by Planting These Species to Diversify, Protect Local Trees

Elm

Serviceberry

Tulip Tree



The homeowner's affinity toward maples has led to a glut of the oft-planted tree. About 40 percent of Iowa's street trees are maples—and that poses risks. “We shouldn't put all of our chips on maples” or any tree in disproportionate numbers, says DNR forester Emma Bruemmer. “Too many of one species spells potential disaster for disease outbreak and catastrophic tree losses. We want a mix of city trees for contrasting colors and shades, textures and aesthetics and forest health.”

Fortunately, many species have similar—even better—benefits and traits as popular trees. This fall, plant from these ten remarkable species to beautify while adding resilience and diversity to your community forest.

American elm *Ulmus americana*

This elegant American icon is back with disease resistant cultivars. Once the most popular shade tree adorning the streets of nearly every town, Dutch elm disease wiped out 100 million of the vase-shaped, towering giants by the 1970s. “People older than 50 still recall with great emotion the beauty of elm lined streets,” says DNR forester Laura Wagner. “We want elms back in the urban forest canopy.” These three rapid growing, hardy cultivars feature the best branch patterns for reduced pruning: Jefferson, prairie expedition (Lewis and Clark) and Princeton.

Kentucky coffeetree *Gymnocladus dioica*

“This is my favorite up and coming tree,” says Bruemmer.

Despite the name, the tree is native to Iowa. Rarely affected by disease or insects and tolerant of urban soils, it is a first-rate choice along streets and yards. “With thick branches and few twigs, the unique growth pattern looks amazing in winter, especially when draped in seed pods,” she says. Pod-less trees are also available. The sparse, open branching allows more solar warming of homes in winter versus other trees. In summer, the compound leaves filter light, allowing brighter conditions compared to heavy shade trees. “That makes growing a thicker, grassy yard easier.” As a nitrogen-fixing legume, this tree also improves soils.

Tulip tree *Liriodendron tulipifera*

A relative of the magnolia, the splendid tulip tree flowers will delight the entire neighborhood. No other tree has a four-lobed leaf and come May, the hefty cream and orange tulip-like flowers are sure to please. Fast growing, yet not prone to storm damage, this relatively disease- and insect-resistant tree adds to neighborhood tree diversity.

American hophornbeam *Ostrya virginiana*

This shade-tolerant, small to mid-size tree makes a great choice for side yards and can be planted closer to homes than most trees. An Iowa native common in upland forest understory, it provides fall color with yellow leaves and grows well in sun or shade. Tough and hardy, it is disease and insect resilient.



Blackgum



Hornbeam



London Planetree



Kentucky Coffeetree



Hophornbeam

Sweetgum

BE SHOVEL READY!

Fall is great for tree planting. Operation ReLeaf and Plant Some Shade are two residential tree programs offering high quality trees at greatly reduced prices. Alliant Energy's Operation ReLeaf program offers 3- to 8-foot landscaping trees for \$25 each (alliantenergy.com or call Laura Wagner at 515-281-6749) MidAmerican Energy customers can purchase trees through Plant Some Shade for \$30 (midamericanenergy.com, 800-434-4017)

Oak



London planetree *Platanus x acerifolia*

Make a statement and plant this fast growing, majestic shade tree that dominates the streets and parks of England. Virtually identical to the familiar American sycamore, the London planetree is a hybrid first found in London in 1663. With better resistance than sycamores to anthracnose, a fungal disease, this tree also handles wet locations. Tolerant of tough urban settings, it is often planted along streets. Recommended cultivars are bloodgood and exclamation.

Heritage oak *Quercus robur x macrocarpa*

This relatively new species is a cross of English oak and bur oak. With faster growth than native oaks, it is thought to have better resistance to bur oak blight. "It has a great form that doesn't require a lot of pruning," says Wagner. It is a nice shade tree with a tatter-resistant canopy, outstanding vigor and dense crown. It may reach 50 feet tall.

Serviceberry *Amelanchier spp.*

"This is my favorite native ornamental tree," says Wagner. "There is something going on with it all year." The small tree blooms with white flowers in spring, yields bright red edible berries in June and finishes with brilliant orange or red leaves in autumn. A great tree for birdwatchers, as the berries are bird magnets. Similar in size to a redbud, in either a tree or clump form variety, it is a smart choice to plant near air conditioners for shade. Good cultivars include autumn brilliance, Cole's select, cumulus, Princess Diana and strata.

American hornbeam *Carpinus caroliniana*

This small, shade tolerant tree offers rusty, reddish orange fall color and is perfect in areas with limited space and to create privacy in yards. Native to Iowa's forest understory, it is not common in urban settings. The unique, rippled smooth bark has gray to blue undertones that provide interest during winter.

Two Species for Southern Iowa

These two species are found in southern states, but can grow in USDA Plant Hardiness zone 5b, in southern and southeastern Iowa.

Sweetgum *Liquidambar styraciflua*

A popular ornamental tree in the south, it explodes in a firestorm of fall colors. Its unique star-shaped leaves turn purple, orange, red and yellow—even on the same tree. A good shade provider.

Blackgum *Nyssa sylvatica*

Common across the south where it is called tupelo, it is known for brilliant fall color—even outshining maple—with deep red to burgundy colors. It remains attractive in winter due to the wide branch angles that give it a different look. At 30 to 50 feet high, this smaller shade tree has a pyramidal shape and lustrous dark green leaves in summer. Its small berries provide an important fuel for migrating birds.