



Southern Shade Trees

Care and Maintenance Fact Sheet



What to Expect

There are five specimens of shade trees that thrive in North Carolina landscapes and are the ones we rely on for our clients' landscaping needs. Since they are useful for providing shade to homes and yards, it makes sense that most of them are quite tall at maturity. In addition to height, mature shade trees have an expansive spread and extensive root systems, so it is best to plant them at least 20 feet away from the house.

Besides shade, planting large shade trees has another advantage in the landscape – providing a natural privacy fence to block views to and from neighboring houses, even at second and third story heights. Our installation of mature Southern shade

trees provides an instant solution to a tricky privacy problem.

Overall, these five specimens are relatively drought tolerant, tolerate most soil conditions in moderation, and are long-lived, providing years – even generations – of shade and enjoyability to the landscape.

Red Maple

The brilliant red leaves in autumn distinguish this shade tree in the



Southern garden. It grows 40-50 feet tall and is a medium to fast grower at one to two feet per year. In addition to red foliage, these trees show hints of red in late winter when red flower buds emerge and later

open to showy red flowers on red leaf stems with red fruit. Red Maples prefer somewhat moist soil but are adaptable to a range of soil types and conditions. There is no need to prune, but if it is necessary to remove any limbs, it is best to do a light pruning only after maturity and in the summertime to minimize sap loss.

River Birch

As a relatively rapid grower, River Birch trees grow up to 70 feet tall at maturity. They tolerate both wetness



and drought and thrive in full sun as well as partial shade. They have an appealing cinnamon-colored bark that curls and peels after maturity. Their spreading limbs provide lots of shade and their multi-stemmed trunks make them beautiful specimens. They often are found

growing naturally along riverbanks, so they soak up lots of moisture from nearby plants and need to stand alone in the landscape. Having them away from the house is good because they drop small limbs throughout the year and shed leaves during rainy summers. It's best to prune River Birches in the late summer or early fall to minimize sap bleeding. There is no need to prune them unless there are dead or diseased branches or limbs that grow too close to the ground that hamper lawn maintenance.

Willow Oak

With fine, narrow leaves that turn yellowish in the autumn, Willow Oaks are a living ornamental feature to add to any yard. It is important they have acidic soil, which is usually naturally occurring in our area, but otherwise are trouble-free to grow as long as provided the right level of moisture. Their rapid growth rate tops out at 60-70 feet, creating dappled shade in the landscape. If you love attracting wildlife to your yard, Willow Oak acorns help keep them coming. The mature tree's rounded form is popular with homeowners not only because of the pleasing shape but also because the small leaves seem to "disappear" in the fall and do not require much raking. It is not



recommended to prune Willow Oaks unless absolutely necessary as they



take a long time to heal.

White Oak

White Oaks are slow growers, but at maturity reach a stately 50-100 feet tall with an equal spread. They thrive



in lawn settings as long as they have adequate space in sun or partial shade. Like other oaks, they prefer acidic soil that is moist, but well-

drained, but will adapt to most soil conditions and are moderately drought tolerant. They work best planted away from sidewalks and driveways as their trunks flare out at the bottom. They should be pruned in the winter or early spring before they leaf out. White Oaks also drop acorns after maturity, which wildlife loves.

Red Oak

This easy grower gets up to 80 feet tall at maturity and tolerates poor soil



conditions. Red Oaks are long-lived like most oaks and prefer acidic soil that is on the dry side. Showy leaves are dark green on top and contrasted with a downy tan coating on the bottom. They don't

need much pruning but if necessary, trim them in late winter or early spring. When established, Red Oaks are drought tolerant. Their acorns take two years to mature and drop and are valued by wildlife.

How to Water Large Transplants

Drip irrigation is the best solution for maintaining the perfect level of moisture for large trees, assuming the irrigation system works well and is regularly inspected for signs of damage by gnawing wildlife. Water your transplanted tree 7 gallons of water three times per week during the main growing season of March 15 to October 31 for the first year after it has been transplanted. During year two, you can reduce the number of watering sessions to 2 per week. After establishment, shade trees do not need consistent irrigation and only need to be watered during extremely long dry spells.

How to Fertilize

Most Southern shade trees do not need regular fertilization, especially when they are planted in a fertilized lawn. Although most are hardy and disease-resistant, it is best to contact your landscape professional if you notice any disturbing issues.