



Morrisville Environmental Advisory Council

Tree planting and species recommendations

How close to my house should I plant a tree?

The distance from your house depends on the mature height of the tree and the spread of its crown at maturity. The planting distance should be a minimum of half of that canopy. Large trees with wide canopies should be further away from a building than a tree that grows more narrowly. Remember, the branches of the mature tree should not contact the sides or roof of your home. Many people mistakenly plant their young trees too close to the house and then realize their mistake years later.

The Arbor Foundation Spacing Guide (below) suggests that trees can be planted a little closer than we recommend.

Basic Spacing Guide		
	Minimum spacing from wall of 1 story building	Minimum spacing from corner of 1 story building
Small trees (30' or less)	8-10'	6-8'
Medium trees (30-70')	15'	12'
Large trees (70' or more)	20'	15'

Other planting considerations:

- Avoid planting below overhead wires, or above underground pipes and utility lines. Many unforeseen problems can be avoided.
- Does the species require sun or shade? A location with less than 6 hours of sun per day is a shady location.
- Does your species of tree prefer moist or dry soil? Before planting, dig a two foot test hole a day after it rains. If the soil is powdery dry, it is not a moist location.
- When the tree matures, will the area it shades affect garden areas or other trees that need full sun?
- When the tree matures, will it enhance or will it obscure your preferred views from the windows in your home?

What trees should I plant?

The MEAC recommends planting native species whenever possible.

Listed below are some favorites of the Morrisville EAC:

- 🌳 Cercis canadensis - Eastern redbud
 - 20-30' tall, 25-35' wide
 - Early spring pink-purple flowers
 - Sun to light shade
- 🌳 Chionanthus virginicus - Fringetree
 - 12 – 20' tall, 12 – 20' wide
 - Full sun to partial shade
 - Late spring white flowers
- 🌳 Amelanchier laevis – Serviceberry
 - 15 – 25' tall, 5 – 10' wide
 - Spring white flowers
 - Full sun to shade
- 🌳 Cotinus obovatus - American Smoketree
 - 20 – 30' tall, 20 – 30' wide
 - Early spring airy whitish flowers
 - Full sun
- 🌳 Carpinus caroliniana – American hornbeam or musclewood
 - 20 – 30' tall, 20 – 30' wide
 - Full sun to shade

- 🌳 Betula nigra – River birch
 - 50-70' tall,
 - May have single or clumped trunks, showy bark
 - Full sun to part shade

Trees to avoid:

- 🌳 Bradford pear or callery pear cultivars
- 🌳 Trees marketed as extra fast growers for screening often have weak wood and often break prematurely
- 🌳 Ash (due to ash borer infestation)
- 🌳 Avoid Asian and European species (promote biodiversity with a beautiful native Pennsylvania species instead)
- 🌳 Norway maples
- 🌳 Tree-of-Heaven
- 🌳 Siberian elm
- 🌳 Princess tree (also known as empress tree)

Need more information to make all these important decisions? Keep reading!

The PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources provides a list of invasive plants and trees at:

<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/List.htm>

The Lower Makefield Township EAC has excellent references for information on native tree and plant species:

<http://www.lmt.org/Native%20Plant%20List%20Trees.pdf>

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More tree information can be found at:

TreeVitalize:

<http://www.treevitalize.net/>

Penn State College of Agriculture:

<http://agsci.psu.edu/>

University of Connecticut Plant Database:

<http://www.hort.uconn.edu/Plants/>

Arbor Day Foundation:

<http://www.arborday.org/>

Also, please see the MEAC “Homeowner’s Guide to Tree Planting,” for planting guidance. Free copies are available at Morrisville Borough Hall or through the Morrisville Borough website (www.morrisvillepagov.com).