

The Sensible Environmentalist

Urban Trees a Good Investment

(NAPSA)—DEAR DR. MOORE:

I want to plant some trees in my yard. What can I do to make sure they survive?



Dr. Moore

You're right to be cautious. Planting trees is a great idea for many reasons, including the fact that it can increase the value of your home and reduce energy costs. Of

course, it's only a good investment if the trees survive. More than 50 percent of trees planted in urban environments die within the first two years.

The first thing to consider is the species. Native trees are often preferable because they're well suited to the climate and soil type. If water restrictions are common during the summer, you'll want trees that thrive in dry conditions—something known in landscaping terms as xeriscaping.

Choosing the right site is also important. Consider how big the trees will be in 50 years, and determine an appropriate distance from buildings, driveways, sidewalks and septic systems.

To save energy, deciduous trees planted on the south and east sides of the house will provide shade in summer and warmth from the sun when they drop their leaves in winter. Evergreens planted on the north and west sides of the home block icy winter

winds. According to the USDA Forest Service, properly positioned trees can reduce air conditioning needs by 30 percent and save 20 to 50 percent of the energy used for heating.

In terms of the actual planting, the most common mistake is digging a hole that's deep and narrow. Root systems are actually shallow and grow horizontally. To get enough oxygen, they have to be planted close to the surface.

Once in the ground, most trees will suffer to some degree from "transplant shock." When the tree is dug from the soil at the nursery it loses most of its roots, making it vulnerable to disease, insects and other problems during the next few years. The best way to ensure its survival is through proper maintenance. Monitoring soil moisture is a good strategy, as is mulching a large area around the tree to moderate soil temperature and stop the growth of competing vegetation.

Urban trees make sense—aesthetically, environmentally and economically. For more information on planting techniques, contact a local nursery or visit the National Arbor Day Foundation at www.arborday.org.

Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmentalist.com.