

Selecting shrubs to fit your landscape

Shrubs in the landscape can serve several purposes or functions. As you think about the shrub selection, determine what you want the shrub to “do” in your landscape. What are you looking for:

- Fence or boundary formed by closely growing bushes or shrubs, also known as a hedge
- Focal point in the landscape
- Foundation planting to integrate the home into the landscape
- Screen for privacy or wind
- “Garden” room or a way to separate outdoor spaces from each other
- Defining a walkway
- Way to minimize drainage issues or erosion

The desired appearance and aesthetics of the shrub selection are also important. These include:

- The growth habit, i.e., is the mature shape pyramidal, columnar, spreading, . . .
- Does the shrub bloom, in what season, and what color?
- What does the foliage look like: color, texture, and shape? And, does the foliage color change by season?
- Is the plant’s appearance interesting in winter, e.g., bark, twig/branch structure, fruit, or berries?
- Does the plant offer benefits to wildlife such as food or shelter?

And, most importantly, the planting site conditions to keep in mind when selecting shrubs for your landscape:

- What is the sun exposure - full sun (6 - 8 hours), part sun (afternoon sun), part shade (morning sun), deep shade (dappled or very little sun)?
- What are the moisture conditions - is the soil perpetually moist or mostly dry?
- Is the plant site exposed to wind and temperature extremes?
- What type of soil is in the planting site, i.e., clay, sandy loam, sand, etc.
- What is the hardiness zone? North Texas is in zones 8a and 8b.
- Are there other plants in the space that will compete for water and nutrients?
- Are there below ground obstructions such as pipes, electrical lines, tree roots?
- Are there overhead obstructions such as electrical or telephone lines?

Once you’ve thought through and determined the plant’s desired purpose and appearance, and most of the site conditions, have a test done on the soil from the planting site. It will provide you with a detailed analysis of your soil and recommendations for how to improve the soil fertility. This link on the Denton County Master Gardener Association website will tell you more about soil testing and the steps

to having one done: <https://dcmga.com/north-texas-gardening/community-gardening/soil-testing/>

Then, check out these websites to help you make the right shrub choice for the purpose, desired appearance and planting site in your landscape:

“Outstanding Shrubs for Texas”, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension: <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/xeriscape/table4.html>

“Texas Superstar® Plants”, Texas AgriLife Research: <https://texassuperstar.com/plants/>

“Top 100 Plants for North Texas”, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension: <https://agriflifeextension.tamu.edu/blog/2015/08/06/top-100-plants-for-north-texas/>

Shop for shrubs at a reputable nursery or garden center. Check the plant’s overall appearance for health; pull the plant out of the container and look for roots that are light colored and firm; look for circling or girdling roots indicating the plant has been in the container for too long, and the trunk should be straight and branches should have no signs of injury. For more information on what to look for when selecting plants and shrubs go to this website:

“Selecting Trees and Shrubs”, Iowa State University Extension: <https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/2005/8-10/select.html>

Taking the time to consider all these factors will help you make a wise investment and add lasting beauty to your landscape.