

Shade trees that make yards more comfortable

Popular shade trees that also provide beauty to landscapes

Various factors motivate the decisions homeowners make when designing their landscapes. Some may be motivated by the ways additions will affect the resale value of their homes, while others may be guided by a love for a particular type of plant. Comfort is yet another motivator and shade trees can make yards more comfortable as the mercury rises. According to the Arbor Day Foundation, the following are some popular shade trees that can add beauty to a landscape and make it more comfortable come the dog days of summer.

- Quaking aspen: The quaking aspen has the widest natural range of any tree in North America, spanning 47 degrees of latitude, 110 degrees of longitude (nine time zones) and elevations from sea level to timberline. That impressive range is no doubt why the United States Forest Service notes that the quaking aspen can grow in greatly diverse regions, environments and communities.

- Northern catalpa: The Arbor Day Foundation notes that the northern catalpa is easily identifiable thanks to its heart-shaped leaves and twisting trunks and

branches. Nature enthusiasts and particularly those who enjoy bird-watching, may be happy to learn that the flowers of the catalpa are frequently visited by hummingbirds.

- Red sunset maple: Its name alone makes many people think of lazy summer days spent lounging in the yard. The red sunset maple provides ample shade and comes with the added benefit of producing an awe-inspiring blend of red and orange leaves come the fall. Red sunset maples can survive in a range of habitats and their adaptable roots mean they can thrive in

various soil types.

- Northern red oak: The state tree of New Jersey, the northern red oak is, according to the Arbor Day Foundation, both beloved for its aesthetic appeal and valued for its adaptability and usefulness. Northern red oaks can tolerate urban conditions, but they do not do well in hot climates.

- Sawtooth oak:

Another tree that produces some awe-inspiring color, the sawtooth oak is a durable, adaptable shade tree. Golden yellow leaves in the spring



will give way to dark green in summer, only to turn yellow and golden brown in the fall. The Tree Center Plant Supply Co. notes that the sawtooth oak can thrive in warmer climates where shade trees that can coexist with high temperatures can be hard to find.

Shade trees can add beauty to a property and make a yard more comfortable.

Homeowners are urged to discuss shade trees with a local lawn and garden professional prior to planting.

Choosing materials for decking

Warm weather often gives rise to thoughts about spending time in the great outdoors. Decks can expand outdoor living spaces, making them popular home additions. However, when it comes time to map out a deck building plan, individuals may be unsure as to which deck material will meet their needs.

Wood and composite decks are among the most popular choices today and the popularity of aluminum is growing steadily.

Wood.

Wood is a versatile and attractive decking material. According to the wood resource Real Cedar, some people think that wood is too expensive and requires too much maintenance. In fact, domestic softwoods can be very cost-effective decking options. According to Remodeling Magazine's "Cost vs. Value" report, wood decks retain considerable resale value.

In terms of maintenance, choosing a rot-resistant wood can result in less maintenance. Durable

woods include cedar and redwood. Popular Mechanics says both species contain tannins and oils that make them naturally resistant to decay, rot and voracious insects. Periodic cleaning and inspection/repairs will be needed, but wood can be much more durable than people may think.

Composite.

Composite decking and its close cousin, plastic lumber, are some of the fastest-growing decking materials on the market. Many products are made from polyethylene or polyvinyl chloride. Some composites will be comprised of recycled plastic and wood fibers to create a weather and stain resistant material that doesn't warp, rot or splinter. Composite manufacturers continually experiment with manufacturing processes to duplicate the look of natural wood grain.

Homeowners are often drawn to composite decking because such decks require little maintenance. These decks do not need to be sanded, stained or refinished. However, mold and mildew can

grow in shady, damp areas, so homeowners must realize that these products are not completely maintenance-free.

Aluminum.

Although aluminum decks are not seen that often, there are reasons why this decking material is becoming more popular. According to LockDry, a manufacturer of aluminum decking materials, power-coated aluminum does not need to be replaced due to rotting, cracking or warped boards. Most planks have interlocking edges that create gap-free, watertight decks. Aluminum also has the advantage of being a very strong but lightweight material.

Some people may think that aluminum decks would be hot underfoot, but the material actually stays cooler in the sun because of its heat-dissipation properties. For those who have green goals in mind, aluminum is totally recyclable.

Various decking materials can meet the look, price point and maintenance level homeowners desire.

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