

The best trees to plant in Nebraska. And the worst.

By Lexie Heinle / World-Herald staff writer | Posted: Thursday, April 23, 2015 1:00 am

It's tough to be a tree in Nebraska.

Drought, ice storms and tree diseases can take their toll on our green infrastructure. Although replacing those dead trees is important, not all trees are created equal, said Justin Evertson, interim director for the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum. Here are some types to plant this Earth Day and Arbor Day.

Bur Oak

Drought-tolerant; very tough and reliable.

Evertson said these trees' slow growth but long lifespans mean they will "span the generations in a community."

Elm

Tolerant of wet and drought. There are many new disease-resistant types of elms, and elms will provide shade more quickly than oaks.

Pecan

Suitable to eastern Nebraska; fast growing.

This multitasking tree provides shade in addition to its nut production, Evertson said.

Tulip

Suitable to eastern Nebraska; more prone to ice storm damage.

In addition to its name-deriving flowers, this tree's distinctive leaves flutter in the wind like a cottonwood's.

Persimmon

Suitable for eastern Nebraska; prefers moist, fertile soil. This medium-size tree, reaching 30 feet at maturity, is native to the eastern Great Plains and has tasty fruit.

Concolor Fir

Drought-tolerant.

Evertson described this evergreen tree as a good survivor that performs well in the Nebraska climate.

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Steer clear of these

Although all trees benefit the environment, there are some bad apples in the bunch. Whether because of over-planting, disease or poor growth, these are the trees to avoid.

Native ashes

The emerald ash borer has been found within 100 miles of Omaha in Creston, Iowa. The foreign insect kills defenseless native trees like black ash, green ash and white ash. For more information, visit the EAB page on the Nebraska Forest Service's website at nfs.unl.edu/emerald-ash-borer.

Ornamental pear

Justin Evertson, interim director of the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, says “no more” to this foreign and invasive import. In addition to growing in unwanted places, this tree supports only birds — not native insects and pollinators. Graham Herbst, Nebraska Forest Service community forestry specialist, describes this tree as “sterile and worthless.” Try pawpaw, black gum or black cherry trees instead.

Mulberry, Siberian elm and silver maple

These weed-like trees seed and thrive in tough conditions, overwhelming native plants. Additionally, mulberry's branches tend to break easily, causing a hazard.

Freeman maple or autumn blaze

This over-planted maple — Evertson estimates tens of thousands in the state — is also prone to storm damage. Some alternatives for the desired fall color include scarlet oak, sweetgum and miyabe maple.

Evergreens

Whether because of Nebraska's humidity or pine wilt disease, this tree category generally struggles, although there are some notable exceptions, like the Colorado Spruce and Black Hills Spruce.