

Trees and Shrubs for Mountain Areas

Fact Sheet No. 7.423

Gardening Series | Trees and Shrubs

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This fact sheet discusses non-native trees and shrubs for mountain areas above 6,500 feet. For native trees and shrubs for Colorado landscapes please refer to fact sheets 7.421 and 7.422. For recommendations for lower altitudes, see fact sheets 7.418, *Small Deciduous Trees*; 7.419, *Large Deciduous Trees*; 7.414, *Evergreen Shrubs*; and 7.403, *Evergreen Trees*.

The dividing line for a wide variety of trees appears to be at or near 7,500 ft. in Colorado. Tables 1 and 2 include non-native trees and shrubs hardy for various elevations above 6,500 feet.

Selection

Use the list of shrubs and trees from the following tables as a guide to select those most adaptable to local elevation and exposure. These lists do not take into consideration the different microclimates (such as north, south, east and west facing slopes) and soil conditions possible at a given elevation. Cultural factors to take into consideration include:

- Soil moisture and drainage. The following tables include a notation on moisture and drainage conditions for best performance and survival.
- Exposure. Some plants perform better in the shade, others in full sun. Exposure to wind can also determine whether a tree or shrub will survive at higher elevations.
- Length of frost-free period. Some shrubs may survive at a given elevation but may not produce flowers or fruit due to a short frost-free period.

When purchasing trees from a nursery, attempt to find out where the stock was grown. Stock originating from southern and Pacific Coast sources may be less hardy

even though it is sold under the same name as stock from northern or higher elevation nurseries.

Establishment

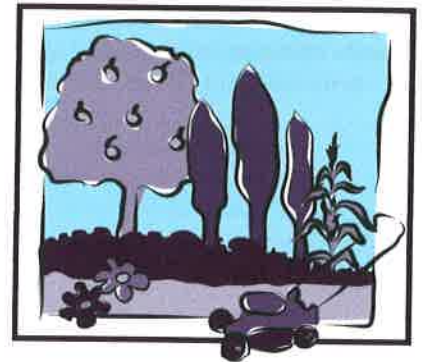
In mountain areas, the best time to plant trees and shrubs is as early in spring as the soil can be worked, provided that the planting stock is fully dormant. Leafed-out plants should be planted after the last frost, up until mid-August. Nursery stock grown below 6000 feet leafs out earlier. New growth may not be hardened enough to withstand the current conditions at higher elevation at planting time. Acclimate plants by gradually exposing them to mountain conditions over a period of several days or weeks. Bring them outdoors for longer periods of time each day.

Shrubs grown in pots can be planted anytime spring through late summer (mid-August to early September, depending on elevation) in order to allow some root establishment before the ground freezes.

Use organic mulches, such as pine needles, shredded bark or wood chips, around the plant to delay freezing of the soil in the fall and to prolong root development. Mulching 3 to 4 inches deep over the root area also helps to retain soil moisture. To reduce the potential for insect, disease and rodent damage, avoid applying mulch directly in contact with tree trunks and woody stems.

Most shrubs in pots are grown in a soilless media. Dig a saucer shaped hole two to three times as wide as a root ball but no deeper than the depth of root ball. Amending the excavated soil 10 to 20 percent by volume with organic material may be beneficial.

In areas where multiple shrubs or trees will be planted, it is best to amend the entire area. Refer to fact sheet 7.235, *Choosing a Soil Amendment*.



Quick Facts

- Consider the length of the growing season, soil characteristics and exposure before selecting trees and shrubs for specific sites.
- Plant trees in the spring.
- Plant shrubs in the spring until late summer.
- Mulch the root area to help delay freezing of the soil in the fall and to retain soil moisture.

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