



PLANTING THE RIGHT PLANT IN THE RIGHT PLACE IS SUSTAINABLE.

There are a number of reasons for choosing plants for the landscape. We may be attracted to their ornamental appeal or call upon them to serve a specific function or purpose in the landscape, such as providing a screen, blocking unwanted views or stabilizing a soil bank. Others may be selected because of their ability to adapt to poor soils or simply for the ease of subsequent care. The freedom to choose from a wide variety of plants depends on the flexibility or restrictions imposed by the individual, the site or, in some cases, the availability of plants in their locale. Plant selection is an organized process that examines several factors: function, aesthetics, site adaptability and management.

Function – Function or purpose defines the reason for the plant use. Looking good certainly justifies a selection, but the value of a plant may go far beyond aesthetic appeal. Function guides the selection of a plant type, such as tree, shrub or perennial and how it will serve the property owners. The shade of a tree canopy, the filtered screen from a hedge or the erosion control of a ground cover addresses the specific objectives of the planting. We can liken the development of our landscape to the development of rooms in our homes – each room is shaped for its intended use and accessorized accordingly.

Aesthetics – Plants are packaged in many ways – their aesthetic qualities are as diverse as the species we have to choose from. Plant aesthetic qualities include the overall habit or shape of the plant and its foliage, flowers, fruit, and bark. The combinations of plant forms, foliage, flowers, fruit and bark can result in creative, artistic displays.

Site Adaptability – Once we have identified the potential aesthetic qualities, the next question is to determine whether or not the plant will truly perform in the soil and environmental conditions on your property. A helpful adage is “Don’t fight the site.” Factors related to site adaptability – such as the plant’s cold hardiness and tolerance for site conditions such as soil type, exposure and light levels – will define whether your aesthetic selections will perform to your expectations.

Management – The final consideration in plant selection is management. After initial establishment, accent plants start to show off their qualities, plant masses begin to integrate, and border plantings achieve their intended shape. We must be realistic in determining the level of maintenance that we are willing to administer and adjust our plant selection accordingly. There is no such thing as a maintenance-free landscape, but low-maintenance landscapes are possible. Horticultural practices such as pruning, fertilization, irrigation and pest management need to be considered in making our final plant choices.

Plant selection is an organized process that examines several factors: function, aesthetics, site adaptability and management. The diversity of plant species and the multitude of cultivars, hybrids and varieties make for creative and appealing landscape compositions.