

## Plant Some Trees

By Susan Camp

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*So here is what I think we ought to do...while we are thinking about all these things. I think we should all plant some trees. It will help a little bit.*

*Maury Telleen*

No, I don't spend hot summer afternoons perusing old issues of *The Draft Horse Journal*; I had never heard of the magazine until I happened upon this quote from Iowa farmer, homesteader, editor, and "land steward," Maury Telleen, so named by Virginia writer and farmer Donald McCaig in his 1992 memoir, "An American Homeplace."

In 1971, McCaig and his wife, Anne, left New York City and moved to rural Highland County, VA where they purchased a run-down, 250-year-old sheep farm that lacked running water, indoor plumbing, and central heat. The McCaigs set out to become homesteaders and soon discovered that it was not the life for the fainthearted.

The McCaigs continued to farm, but after a disastrous year in the late 1980s, considered selling out. McCaig visited several farmer-homesteaders across the country, including Telleen and poet-essayist-farmer Wendell Berry to hear their views about "land and work, community, food, and money."

Farming and homesteading are not for me, but I can relate to Telleen's suggestion to plant some trees. Jim and I live among a lot of trees. Some are too close to the house, but we have never removed a tree just because we didn't like it, or it blocked a view. In fact, we added many trees, some planted too closely together, in our early years here on Cedarbush Creek. Don't make that mistake. It will haunt you in later years.

Life is difficult in some way for almost everyone right now. Weather, health, money, politics, relationships, far-off wars, famine-- as you read this, you are probably thinking of your own personal or family concerns.

So, plant a tree, preferably a native one, but not until the fall when it will have the best chance of survival. Choose a tree that tolerates our environment; puts down deep roots; has a strong crown structure; resists disease and insect infestation; and is aesthetically attractive in every season.

Consider the intended purpose of the tree. Do you want a shade tree, an understory tree, a spring-flowering ornamental? If a yard filled with leaves in the fall annoys you, plant an evergreen instead of a deciduous tree.

Choose a tree that will grow to the appropriate size for your property. Purchase a small tree. It will grow quickly in the first few years.

Prepare the site in advance. Send a soil sample to Virginia Tech; the results will help you select the appropriate amendments. Take into consideration the soil texture, structure, and moisture of

the planting site. Is the soil coarse or fine? Is it loose or compacted? Does the site drain well or does it hold moisture after a rain?

Some of my favorite native trees include tupelo or black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*). Tupelo reaches a mature height of 40 to 60 feet with visual interest for each season, especially its autumn display of brilliant scarlet, yellow, orange, and purple leaves.

*Diospyros virginiana*, the common or American persimmon is a small tree, growing 30 to 40 feet high with a short trunk. The persimmon fruit varies from the size of a cherry to that of an apple and ranges in color from yellow to deep orange-red, depending on the variety. Tannin production renders the unripe fruit hard and bitterly astringent. The ripe fruit is sweet.

~~Eastern redbud (*Prepare the site in advance. Send a soil sample to Virginia Tech; the results will help you select the appropriate amendments. Take into consideration the soil texture, structure, and moisture of the planting site. Is the soil coarse or fine? Is it loose or compacted? Does the site drain well or does it hold moisture after a rain?*)~~

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*Cercis canadensis*) is a deciduous shrub or small tree with a short trunk that usually splits one to two feet above the ground to form two distinct trunks. The average mature height is 20 to 30 feet. Magenta buds open on old wood into fragrant, lavender-pink flowers in spring. Light green, heart-shaped leaves appear as the flowers fade, gradually changing to a glossy dark green.

Plant some trees for their beauty in every season, their steadfastness, their usefulness. It will help.