



Small space? Try using small desert-adapted trees

It is far too common to see trees that are entirely too large for the yards they occupy. When trees with canopies reaching 30 foot or greater at maturity like *Ficus nitida* or Chilean mesquite, are planted in tiny front or narrow side yards the amount of pruning needed to keep the trees a manageable size is overwhelming. Not only is it a tremendous amount of work and expense, the pruned branches represent green waste which ends up taking space in our landfill.

Here are some helpful hints to help you select the right plant for your yard:

Consider the Mature Size – be sure to consider the mature height and width of the tree and plant accordingly. It is often deceiving to see the small trees in their petite 5 or 15 gallon containers at the nurseries.

Leave Ample Room – Don't be fooled! Check the mature size before planting one within 3 feet of your home foundation or your fences.

Making a Point - Think about the way your yard is used. Avoid planting thorny trees near active areas or walkways.

Desert Dwellers - Know that many desert trees, such as Palo Verdes, Acacias and Mesquites have a multiple trunk shrub-like structure by nature. This survival mechanism helps to shade the ground below and conserve moisture. Pruning desert trees into to one central trunk or lollipop shapes so they fit the space is unnatural and often unnecessary.

Dare to Cross the Line? – Don't forget that plants do not formally recognize property boundaries. Planning for tree's mature size will help avoid canopies that may extend into adjacent property. Be conscientious about the impact of the tree canopy on the neighbor's property.

Don't Crowd the Canopies – Provide trees with ample room for branch development. Trees spaced too closely together or too near adjacent structures often become bowed or lopsided as they reach for sunlight.

Support Group - Trees do not automatically need to be staked. Try to choose nursery stock that looks stable in the container, so you will not need to stake it once it is in the ground. If it cannot stand without a stake, make sure the ties are adjusted regularly so they are not tight on the trunk. Slight movement of the trunk within the ties triggers the creation of dense wood resulting in a stronger trunk. A tree should not be staked longer than one year, as long as it is being watered correctly and at the right location.

Remember the Roots! - A trees active feeder roots are at the canopy line and beyond. Be sure to water there and not right up next to the trunk. Trees that are watered deeply and infrequently at the canopy drip line are less susceptible to wind throw in our monsoon season. To find out more about proper watering refer to our free brochure [Landscape Watering by the Numbers](#) or contact the Water Conservation Office at conserve@chandleraz.gov or call 480-782-3580.

Use Large Shrubs as Small Trees – Many large shrubs can be trained into fine specimen trees for tiny areas. Carol Shuler, Arizona landscape architect suggests the use of tall, upright plants that bloom. For example, instead of an oak tree consider Mexican Bird of Paradise. Other species to consider include Desert Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia lunarioides*), Texas Olive (*Cordia boisieri*), Kidneywood (*Eysenhardtia orthocarpa*), and Sugar Bush (*Rhus ovata*).

A List of Short Plants suitable for diminutive sites is available on line at:

<http://www.mswn.com/MSWNshortstuff.htm>

So, what trees might make a great addition to your desert landscape? Refer to our [Guide to Small Desert-Adapted Trees](#).

Be sure to visit the City of Chandler Water Conservation web pages for free landscape workshops, landscaping tips, rebates, frequently asked questions and more.

www.chandleraz.gov/water

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