

## So You Need a Shade Tree, ASAP?

By Cindy Murray



Strider's honey locust tree; Red maple and cottonwood grow relatively fast.

An old 70's song goes, "You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone." This was certainly the case for our old Labrador Retriever, Strider when we relocated from the lushly irrigated suburbs of Southern California to the Timberline locale five miles northeast of Flagstaff. Our property was devoid of nearly all vegetation, and poor Strider was beside himself in search of a patch of shade. In the mornings and evenings, he lounged in the shadows cast along the fence and house, but by noon, he had to take comfort in a jerry-rigged shelter of lawn furniture and old linens, or indoors. Desperate for a practical solution, we headed for the local nurseries in search of fast-growing shade trees.

It wasn't long before our dog was enjoying the lacy canopy of our "Sunburst" honey locust, a shade tree we planted smack dab in the middle of the back yard especially for him.

In the intervening years since Strider's quest for shade, I've gleaned a bit of knowledge about fast-growing shade trees, which I'll share with you. Strider's honey locust is now a strikingly attractive moderate-sized shade tree with fernlike chartreuse leaves and does fairly well in windy areas, like ours. They fare better than many trees do in smaller growing spaces. These trees make handsome specimens along roads and thrive in most soils with good drainage. We have learned that to prevent die-back, we must water Strider's honey locust during dry spells year-round.

Although red maples are not normally recommended for dry, windy environments such as Timberline's, my neighbors have one that puts on a spectacular show of bright red leaves each fall. They have given it the ample irrigation and sunlight preferred by these gorgeous trees. There are several varieties, so consult your nursery about which ones suit your microclimate and are truly fast-maturing. Amur maple is a good option for windy regions. For non-windy areas, I recommend autumn blaze maple, silver maple, and sugar maple.

Looking for a tree that displays pinkish white flowers in the spring and burgundy leaves all summer? A good choice would be the flowering plum, which is also suited for small yards. Snip off any thin, green, vertical "sports" that arise from main branches. Be sure to look for hardy cultivars if you live in a colder microclimate. Flowering plums are not well-suited for windy regions.

If you're in the market for a moderately fast-growing evergreen, you may opt for a Ponderosa pine, Flagstaff's own iconic native tree. You must, however give it abundant room to grow in height and width.

Globe/Navajo willow can reach 70' tall and 60' wide, grows extremely rapidly, and is fairly tolerant of drought, poor soils, and windy conditions. Weeping willows are gorgeous and fast growing, but the roots are water-seeking and should be planted away from main structures, walkways, and ponds.

'Purple Robe' black locust sports lovely purple clusters of flowers in early summer. It attains a height of 75' with an open crown. Its roots can be aggressive, so plant it far from water and sewage lines. It's drought-tolerant once established and performs well in windy conditions.

Often serving as a windbreak, the cottonwood is common in Doney Park and Timberline but requires plenty of room to spread high and wide. The roots are thirsty and sometimes invasive. Our own cottonwood stands as a stately centerpiece in our front lawn.

Fruit trees like apple, cherry, and peach furnish plentiful shade and grow fairly quickly. What's more, they have lovely blossoms—that is, unless they are subject to high winds and frosts—which may strip the tree of blossoms, along with any hopes of a good harvest. We have all three of these fruit trees, and we enjoy them even when they don't produce a good crop.

Your trees will stand a greater chance of survival and grow at their maximum rate if you keep them well-watered through their first few years. Most of the trees I've mentioned here are available at our local nurseries, but it would be a good idea to check ahead.