

## Tree Selection: Size Does Matter

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When shopping for trees and shrubs, size really does matter. I've seen many expensive landscape mistakes over the years where people planted the wrong size tree or shrub in the wrong location. And in nearly every such occurrence, it was because the plant was too large for where it was planted.

One of the most expensive examples of this is people planting large trees underneath utility lines. You can NOT plant a 50 foot tall tree underneath a 25 foot high power line and not expect it to cause problems! Vectren spends millions of dollars each year on vegetation management under and around their electric and natural gas lines. And despite my reputation as a card-carrying tree hugger, as one of the many people without power for a week during the ice storm of 2009, I was all for cutting down every street tree that was planted too close to the lines!

Other common complaints include:

- \* Trees hanging over the customer's house.
- \* Trees hanging over the neighbor's house.
- \* Shrubs sprawling out and blocking sidewalks, driveways, and alleys.
- \* Shrubs blocking windows, or growing into the home's siding.

Before buying a tree or shrub, examine your property closely. Measure the dimensions of your land, paying close attention to utility lines, property boundaries, and the home itself. It helps to sketch out your property to scale on graph paper, or use one of the internet mapping websites (such as Google Maps or MapQuest) set on "Earth View."

Next, do some research on the types of plants you wish to buy. How large do they get at maturity? Realize that woody plants get both tall and wide, and you need to know both measurements when selecting a good place for them. You can find this information on the plant tag at the nursery; in numerous books on trees and shrubs; and on several websites (including the excellent Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder: <http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderSearch.aspx> ).

For example: let's say I was going to plant a Blue Princess Holly (*Ilex x meserveae* 'Blue Princess'). According to the Plant Finder website, this shrub gets 10 to 15 feet tall, and 8 to 10 feet wide. I will certainly not want to plant it in front of my window, since

I won't be able to see outdoors, or get sunlight for my houseplants. I also don't want this beautiful shrub to grow into the sidewalk, so I need to plant it a minimum of 5 feet (half of its total width) from the walkway.

When it comes to power lines, Vectren worries not only about branches hanging over the wires, but of the tree uprooting and taking out the lines. For this reason, in their "Right Tree, Right Place" flyer, they want new trees to be planted almost as far from the lines as the height of the plant.

This may seem restrictive, but it is common sense to avoid future troubles now, with proper plant selection and placement. For more information on selecting the right sized tree or shrub for your property, contact the Purdue Extension Service at (812) 435-5287.