

Drought Survivor Trees
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When selecting trees that thrive in droughty summer conditions, the old adage, “right plant right place” truly applies. Trees usually outlive people and achieve proportions well beyond those suggested on their nursery tags, which estimate size at age 10. In my sandy, sunny southwest-facing garden, most of them look like gawky teenagers. Trees need time to achieve their potential. I always refer to “Sunset Western Garden Book,” edited by Kathleen Brenzel, and Arthur Kruckeberg’s “Gardening with Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest” to help insure I’m lusting after the right tree for the site, and not some bad boy.

Long-term, sometimes pricey investments, trees deserve careful attention especially the first several years. Water deeply every two weeks from August until rainfall begins in October. Filling a moat made at planting time helps direct water downward. Water needs vary depending on actual weather and soil conditions. If a tree shows signs of stress -- leaf edges fried, whole leaves curled, drooping or wilted, needles dropping -- yikes, should have paid closer attention and watered sooner. Mulch spread several feet beyond the initial planting hole helps retain moisture and moderates soil temperature.

I plant or retain volunteers of both native and exotic species, experiencing success and failure in both categories. Species listed below exhibit two to four seasons of interest, for flowers, fruit, foliage, fall color or bark. Here are my favorite survivors:

Native evergreens: shore pine (*Pinus contorta* var. *contorta*), Lawson cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*), grand fir (*Abies grandis*), Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), and madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*). Beware that all but shore pine become huge and aren’t suited to tiny gardens.

Native deciduous: alder (*Alnus rubra*), hazel (*Corylus cornuta*), bitter cherry (*Prunus emarginata*), big-leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*).

Exotic evergreens: *Chamaecyparis obtusa* and *C. pisifera* cultivars, Arizona cypress and Italian cypress (*Cupressus arizonica* and *C. sempervirens* var.). Dwarf pine, spruce and fir cultivated varieties fill voids in a winter garden.

Exotic deciduous: *Stewartia pseudocamellia*, tricolor beech (*Fagus sylvatica* ‘Tricolor’), paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*), Korean dogwood (*Cornus kousa chinensis* ‘China Girl’), crab apple (*Malus* ‘Prairifire’).

Excepting a rare tent caterpillar attack that denuded the alder, all have suffered little from pests or disease. They thrive now with almost no attention during summer drought.