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## **Fast-Growing Trees a Tempting Replacement, But Caution Warranted**

With the recent storm damage and die-off of trees from last year's drought, some people are needing to find replacement trees. Fast-growing plants can be a blessing when you need something in your landscape as soon as possible, but come with their own set of drawbacks. Some of the fastest growing trees aren't native to North America and run the risk of becoming invasive. Even native trees can turn brittle if growing too fast, and the faster a tree grows, the more likely it is to have subpar structure. However, there are some good compromises between fast growth and strong trees.

Oaks aren't known for their fast growth, but Chinquapin and red oaks are exceptions to this rule, with each growing at over 2' per year. Chinquapin oaks are one criminally underrated and underplanted tree, but are gaining more popularity in landscaping, so they are becoming easier to find in garden centers. They are also one of the best white oak species for southeastern Kansas, and come with my full recommendation. However, don't try to fit square pegs in round holes - there may be better choices for your specific location. If you ever have any questions about putting a specific tree in a certain spot, your local extension office can help you find the best tree for what you need.

Because fast-growing trees quickly outgrow arm's length, it will take extra diligence during the tree's early years to prune out any poor branching structure before the tree's growth kicks into high gear and you need extra equipment to do any corrective pruning. Most trees need a strong central leader with multiple horizontal limbs. Some species such as redbuds and ornamental pears fight against this convention, instead sending multiple branches upwards. This is known as decurrent growth. This results in nice-looking canopy shape, but creates a potential point of failure in strong winds. The point at which these upward stems diverge is called the crotch, and the lower that this crotch occurs on the trunk, the more likely you are to experience a total tree failure. Trees that already have weak wood have a much higher risk of failure, so ornamental pears, silver maples, ashes, and pecans all need substantial corrective pruning when they are still small.

When buying a tree from a nursery, you have the option of getting smaller individuals or larger individuals. There are pros and cons to each. Buying a larger tree from the get-go gives you a head start towards a mature tree in the landscape. Most larger trees will also be set in their branching structure, so trees with the right structure will need minimal correction, if any. However, larger trees are a bigger money investment, are harder to transport, and will go through greater transplant shock once you get the tree in the ground. If you are okay with providing extra

care to the tree in its first year until the transplant shock wears off, then a larger tree might be worth the investment.

On the other hand, if your tree needs corrective pruning, if you are concerned about the effects of transplant shock, or if you are trying to save money, a smaller individual is usually worth the extra time that it will take for the tree to grow. For every tree, the best time to be looking to plant trees is in the fall. The soil is still warm from the summer, which encourages root growth. The temperatures are falling, but still relatively warm, and you can get an idea of what fall color your tree will have before you buy it. Your extension office will have publications on how to plant and care for newly planted trees, to give your investment the best possible chance of paying off.

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