

# Fast-growing trees

We live in a *fast*-paced society. We want everything *fast*—the faster the better. We want our news up to the minute; we communicate instantly via text-messaging; we ship things for overnight delivery; we demand a fast internet; and we often eat fast food. We change jobs and move our families much more often than what our parents did.

The fast pace of our lives is also reflected in the choice of landscape plants today. Few of us plant trees in our yards today with the thought that someday our children will enjoy the shade of the tree when it matures. Rather, most people today look for trees that grow fast, provide quick shade, and provide a good resale value when we sell our home.

Although a fast-growing tree can be desirable, beware of the fastest growing trees! They often



provide you with short-term gratification and long-term headaches. Most poplars, aspens, and cottonwoods grow very quickly, but they are weak wooded, break easily in storms, and often die within 25 years. These trees are more suited for rural windbreaks than home landscapes.

Fortunately, there are many outstanding fast-growing trees for landscapes in North Dakota:

Let's start with a sturdy maple with attractive red fall color, the Freeman maple. The variety 'Autumn Blaze' has become a very popular tree in the Midwest due

to its quick growth and scarlet fall foliage. It is commonly used to replace ash trees in communities suffering from emerald ash borer. Some gardeners in North Dakota report dieback of 'Autumn Blaze' after harsh winters. The variety 'Sienna Glen' is hardier (hardy to Zone 3), more tolerant to wind, but reportedly less vibrant and reliable in its fall color. This variety from Minnesota displays a mosaic of orange and burgundy colors in fall. Freeman maple is one of the hottest trees in landscaping today so look for more improved varieties of this maple in the near future. 'Firefall' is the latest variety (Zone 4), noted for its deeply cut leaf shape and

bright fall color (see photo).

Norway maples thrive in urban conditions and display beautiful golden fall foliage. They provide lots of shade—so much shade you may struggle growing grass beneath the tree. 'Emerald Lustre', 'Emerald Queen', and 'Cleveland' are among the most vigorous Norway maple varieties. They are hardy in Zone 4. Norway maples grow so aggressively they are sometimes considered an invasive *weed* in the eastern USA.

Speaking of *weeds*, another maple that grows fast is boxelder. It will grow anywhere and is considered a weed by most land-

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scapers in the USA. This tree is not my favorite since its wood is weak and the tree will decline after 25 years. On the other hand, it is native and well adapted to North Dakota. The variety 'Baron' is male and does not produce the seedpods that attract boxelder bugs (a major nuisance bug in fall). Boxelder is hardy to Zones 2–3 and has golden fall color.

Silver maples grow very fast—maybe too fast since they have a tendency to drop branches after 25 years. Canadian varieties 'Northline' and 'Silver Cloud' are hardy to Zone 3. 'Northline' is sturdier while 'Silver Cloud' is extremely hardy.

It's hard to recommend a poplar or cottonwood since they are weak wooded, susceptible to disease, and grow so tall they become a hazard in home landscapes. A notable exception is 'Highland' poplar, which is resistant to disease, cottonless, and grows only 45 feet tall.

Lindens are popular throughout North Dakota. The Canadian hybrid 'Glenleven' is hardy, grows fast, but lacks fall color. For better fall color, consider growing 'Harvest Gold' Mongolian linden. This unique tree grows shorter than other lindens (30 feet instead of 60 feet) and has glossy foliage, golden buds, and golden fall color. It is a bit more upright than most lindens; prune and train the tree when young to minimize potential damage from ice and storms.

Honeylocust is a fast-growing tree that tolerates moist soil and grows well in the city. It has an open, spreading habit that pro-

vides light shade. It is easy to grow a beautiful lawn underneath honeylocust trees and you rarely need to rake the fallen leaves in autumn. The hardiest variety is 'Northern Acclaim', developed by North Dakota State University.

Hybrid elms have been developed to resist Dutch elm disease. Most of these hybrids lack the spreading "vase" form of the American elm, but recent introductions 'Cathedral', 'Discovery', and 'Prairie Expedition' have a beautiful vase habit, grow fast, and do well on the prairie.

Fast-growing evergreens include larch, Norway spruce, red pine, Scots pine, and arborvitae.

Ash trees have been the most popular fast-growing tree in recent years, but we no longer recommend planting them. It is just a matter of time until the emerald ash borer enters our state and wreaks havoc on our ash trees.

We are very fortunate to have several outstanding nurseries and garden centers in our state. Now is a good time to visit these places, as the landscapers are less rushed and will have more time to talk to you about your landscaping needs. 