

Keeping Sumter Beautiful
For the Love of Trees
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When my nieces were around 7 and 9 years old, I took them to Huntington Beach State Park, where I worked at the time. I loved taking them to an old oak tree we called “the octopus tree” and letting them climb up the twisted limbs that looked like octopus arms sticking up through the sandy soil. I climbed on those same twisted limbs when I was their age. Trees have been like touchstones for memories throughout my life. My favorite rope swing hung from a giant oak in my parents’ back yard. I was greeted with the sweet smell of Magnolia flowers every time I walked out the front door in the summer. I can’t see a Red Cedar without thinking of those that grow beside my family dock, where I’ve spent so many wonderful summer days fishing, crabbing, and swimming in the salt marsh. I look at all these tall, sturdy trees and I see my life reflected back to me in their branches.

As you may have picked up, I love trees. Aside from evoking a swell of nostalgia in me, they serve many important purposes. Trees provide important ecosystem services including providing food and shelter to native animals, reducing soil erosion, and even reducing flooding. Trees also improve air quality and water quality by filtering pollutants, promote infiltration to the groundwater table, and reduce energy use by providing shade to nearby buildings. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, a tree with a 25-foot diameter canopy and associated soil can manage the 1-inch rainfall from 2,400 square feet of impervious surface.

If you’re looking to help support a healthy landscape, a great place to start is by planting a tree or two. Clemson Extension has some great educational resources to help you pick the right tree and plant it in a location and manner that will help it thrive. Start by looking at the Carolina Yards Plant Database at clemson.edu/cy/plants. The Plant Database will help you pick the right plant for the right place in your yard. You can also specify if you want a native species of tree, which will provide added benefits to our native South Carolina species. Be sure to check out HGIC fact sheet 1001: Planting Trees Correctly. You can find it by visiting clemson.edu/hgic and searching “1001”

Planting one tree may seem like an unimportant act, but don’t let that discourage you. These small efforts add up over time and grow to make a real difference. As Dr. Seuss wrote in The Lorax:

“I know it may seem small and insignificant, but it's not about what it is, it's about what it can become.”

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