

Worshipped by ancients, beloved by poets, enshrined by history--trees have been valued through the ages.

Their "roots" are mentioned in early U.S. annals. Many early settlers brought trees with them. Later, our nation welcomed trees from China, Japan, and Korea. The ginkgo, many of the magnolias, Oriental cherries, and crab apples from the Far East are just as familiar to American homeowners as are native trees, such as the flowering dogwood, white fir, and Douglas fir.

Fact and folklore combine to make charming tales. Johnny Appleseed went west with two big bags of apple seeds. Reports of that lumberjack of early American logging days, Paul Bunyan, still are repeated and embellished around campfires. And almost as numerous as sites claiming "Washington slept here," are trees linked with the first president--those he planted, saved, chopped down, or stood under.

Other trees, like the Charter Oak that once stood in Connecticut, are tied closely to important moments in our history. Many--such as the Yoshino cherry trees in Washington, D.C., and the General Sherman Bigtree, the largest living tree in the world--have become tourist attractions.

Traditions associated with trees abound: a crown of laurel for the victor; a white spruce, Scotch pine, or Norway spruce for a Christmas tree; two trees for the newlyweds' home (with a tree later planted for each child).

Whether to start a tradition or for a more immediate purpose, you'll find an array of tree varieties available in a catalogue or at the local nursery. When making your selection, think first of what you want the tree to do: add color, provide a privacy screen, shade a play area, soften harsh architectural lines, hold the soil, or attract wildlife. As a bonus, many trees also will have an accompanying tradition or tale.