

Where Should I Get the Tree?

Article #2 in the Series “So, You Want to Plant a Tree!”

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Let's assume that you have decided to plant a tree (or several) on your property and that you have narrowed down the species you would like to plant. This puts you in a good position to think about actually getting a young tree (or trees) to plant. We'll examine five sources: (a) a garden centre; (b) a nursery; (c) the woods; (d) homegrown from seed; and (e) the annual autumn HRM tree giveaway.

Garden Centres

Because of my life-long interest in trees, and lately trees in the city, I usually spend a few minutes in the garden-centre area of the supermarkets and home-improvement bigbox stores that I visit in search of other products. I check out the species/cultivars, specimen conditions, sources, and prices of the potted trees for sale. I have two main observations about garden centres as a source of trees to plant.

One is that the species/cultivar selection is usually seriously limited and of a narrow range. Unless you have prior knowledge of tree species in Nova Scotia, you might not know whether the species you are examining in the garden centre are native to this province or not (I'm hoping that you care!). In all probability, the stock you see is not from Nova Scotia even if the species grows here by nature. If you have a list of preferred species based on the kinds of considerations in Article #1, you may be disappointed that the garden centre does not have them for sale.

The second observation is that, in general, garden-centre sales staff are not well-versed about trees. They would rely, just like you might, on the tags hanging on each for-sale tree. If there is a Norway maple tree there (*Acer platanoides* L.) and you asked the staff if that species is an invasive alien species in Nova Scotia (which it is), they would probably look at you as if you were an invasive alien species! Unfortunately, the Government of Nova Scotia has not declared Norway maple to be an invasive alien species and prohibited its importation into Nova Scotia. So, there it is, ready for you to buy. If you asked the sales staff for a red maple but neither of you knows the Latin name (which is *Acer rubrum* L., a native species in NS), the staff might point out the Crimson King cultivar of Norway maple (it has the deep red and purple leaves you see frequently around the HRM urban core).

All in all, I find garden centres to be disappointing sources of plantable trees.

Tree Nurseries

Unfortunately, there are no commercial tree nurseries in HRM. The closest we come is the Bloom Greenhouse and Garden Centre in Hammonds Plains which is associated with Springvale Nursery near Berwick. This means that one must travel out of town to visit a tree nursery for a stock purchase. Closest is Baldwin Nursery near Falmouth. In Wolfville is Blomidon Nursery, and near Truro is Charlie the Tree

Guy. I strongly advise a visit to a nursery. The staff are generally very knowledgeable about trees. Sometimes the trees are grown at the nursery from seed collected from local woodlands and trees.

The Woods

What do I mean by “the woods”? I mean digging up a tree in some woodland setting and transplanting it on your property. I strongly support this approach for several reasons. First, in the normal successional patterns of forest stands in Nova Scotia, there are usually hundreds of times more juvenile trees (seedlings and small saplings) than will grow to maturity because of competition from other plants. After a major disturbance such as blowdown, fire, or insect infestation, forest stands can have several tens of thousands of seedlings per hectare, but within 50 years or so, this density could be, by natural mortality, down to a couple of thousand trees per hectare, perhaps even in the hundreds. So don't feel shy about taking a young tree from a wooded ecosystem.

Second, this approach is cheap – probably free! Third, if you are careful about species selection, it's likely you'll be picking up a young tree of a species native to Nova Scotia. There are trees of alien species in the woods, but not commonly.

The key is to do this legally. Most people know somebody who owns a woodlot. Ask them if they would be willing to part with a seedling or sapling – I'm sure most would readily oblige. If you try to take young trees from the roadside or other Crown land, or even private woodlots without the owner's permission, you do so at your own risk.

Homegrown Seeds

Sometimes people are able to collect seeds from local (or far-away) trees and propagate their own seedlings. I fully support this, provided people know what kind of trees they are propagating. Be careful that the species you think you have is not an invasive alien species!

HRM Annual Tree Giveaway

For the first time in recent memory, HRM implemented a tree giveaway program in autumn 2022. Given its runaway success, it is expected that HRM will continue with this venture. That's a good source of a free tree. Be sure to get there early – they go fast!!

Conclusion

Nova Scotia is about 75% wooded, and if you count all the trees in the woods, from seedlings to veterans, there are probably many billions of trees in the province. We are not short of trees. Many, many millions of trees die each year in their first years of life due to competition. At the extremes, you can supply your property with trees that will cost you a few hundred dollars apiece, or you can find ways to get tree propagules for free and start them smaller. One way or the other, you should be very careful that the trees you choose to acquire are of species consistent with your objectives and preferences.