If there is any truth in the old adage about “an ounce of prevention,” it surely applies to the ordering of trees for community forestry. The cardinal rules for ordering better city trees are: (1) Write clear specifications when ordering, (2) base the language on standards as developed by industry experts and contained in American Standard for Nursery Stock (ANSI Z60.1), and (3) inspect the trees before accepting delivery.

Dave Cable, director of TreesCharlotte, describes how his highly successful nonprofit organization and the City of Charlotte follow these rules:

Trees for our volunteer planting program are grown to our specifications which are consistent with the industry standards (ANSI). Sarah Morris (City of Charlotte Landscape Management) helped us establish our quality expectations, which include treated pots, with a keen eye on circling root and co-dominant stem issues. TreesCharlotte tree spec track with the City of Charlotte’s specifications for plant materials and industry standards. Our trees are delivered to our volunteer planting sites and are constantly evaluated by our TreeMasters, many of which are arborists, during the planting process.

The City has a rigorous inspection program to ensure the plant materials are suitable and consistent with the specifications. Although the use of ANSI standards does not guarantee tree quality, the standards do provide common ground for language and measurements as well as helping to guide production methods in the nursery. Developing a good relationship with growers and communicating clearly will prevent the difficult — although sometimes necessary — task of rejecting poor planting stock.

FOR MORE INFORMATION…

For a direct link to ANSI Z60.1 and additional information about the topics mentioned in this bulletin, please visit arborday.org/bulletins, and navigate to the Suplemental Resources Library for Bulletin No. 77.

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There is one thing on which every community can agree: it is that money is one of the things that does not grow on trees. With more expected from small budgets coupled with higher demands for service and savings, it is time to pay more attention to the quality of trees purchased for streets, parks and other public grounds and how they are planted. A few principles can guide the way.

Who would buy a new car without looking at its engine, perhaps kicking its tires and most certainly considering the size of the garage or other space where it will be parked? Yet every year thousands of trees are purchased without a clear understanding of the condition they should be in upon arrival or how they should be treated to assure the best chances for healthy lives.

Charlotte, North Carolina, is a good example of how city arborists have found a solution to this problem. Working in partnership with the nonprofit group TreesCharlotte, this Tree City USA community plants over 15,000 trees annually as it works toward the goal of having 50 percent canopy cover by 2050. Like other communities that recognize the importance of trees and of doing the job right when trees are selected and planted, Charlotte addresses the three keys to better street trees: (1) quality nursery stock, (2) space for the roots, and (3) pruning young trees for structure.

Charlotte’s city arborists work in close partnership with city engineers and landscape architects in designing projects and they rely on regional nurseries for their planting stock. Contractors are used for some planting projects and volunteers with TreesCharlotte carry a large part of the load.

In all cases, quality is clearly specified before any work begins and inspections take place before any finished work is accepted.

In this bulletin, the key principles for growing better city trees are presented along with helpful links to additional information as noted on page 8.