

## The Right Plant for the Right Person

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Choosing the right plant has less to do with mutual attraction as it does with the plant's site requirements. It does little good to place a beautiful Indian Hawthorne or Azalea in a poorly drained (wet) site that will eventually kill the plant. I encourage every Extension user to consider the plant's requirements before they purchase. Far too many times we go to the nursery to purchase a plant with no thought concerning its hardiness zone, light, soil, and growth habit characteristics.

### Hardiness Zones

Camden is one of the largest counties in the state of Georgia. Camden's size combined with its proximity to a warm sea breeze creates a good recipe for numerous microclimates. Many folks often fail to realize that there is a significant difference in the winter temperatures of St Marys and Browntown or even Woodbine. To give yourself the best chance for success, check potential plant selections USDA hardiness zone before you purchase it. Even though Camden County is in Zone 8b many buy plants that are zoned for areas further south. This past spring I had multiple calls on Queen Palms that were damaged by numerous hard freezes this past winter. Yes! Small microclimates (warmer areas) do exist in Camden, but the safest choice is to stick to the zone you live in.

### Light

Plants, like people, have needs that if not met will die. For example, azaleas need filtered sunlight and will not do well in full sun. In addition, dogwood trees are an understory species in the forest, and therefore do best in filtered sunlight. Warm season turfgrasses, no matter the species, will not thrive in deep shade. Your yard should have at least 6 hours of sun if you hope to grow a satisfied lawn. When trees are much too valuable to sacrifice, why not extend pine straw beds and choose a plant like Hosta? With a cultivar name like 'Shade Master', Hostas are much more likely to do well under a dense canopy than turf.

### Soil

Soil requirements are often overlooked when people place recently purchased plants into the ground. The correct pH is essential if nutrient uptake is to be realized/maximized by the plant. Nutrient deficiency problems are easier to prevent than they are to correct! Thankfully, some plants seem to do well in a variety of soils. Crinum Lily, for example, will tolerate extended flooding, clay, sand and acidic soils. The Camden County Extension Office offers soil test for a \$10.00 fee.

### Growth Habit

We make every effort to prevent Extension users from making the far too common mistake of overplanting a given site. Few things are worse than getting everything right except spacing. A Southern Magnolia tree will eat the side of house or a power line if proper spacing is not accounted for. Even midstory trees like River Birch will quickly crowd out homes if not planted at least 20 feet away.

Not only should the consumer be concerned about the distance from the home at the plant's maturity, but the distance from other plants, if considered, will minimize future problems as well. If the property owner is searching for a new hobby (pruning) then plants like a Loropetalum, some varieties growing over 10' tall and wide, will provide the desired outcome. An informed buyer would search for the 'Suzane' cultivar of Loropetalum which maxes out at 4' high and wide. Perhaps the best example of not matching the right plant with the right person is found with the much loved Crepe Myrtles. Few people realize that there are three sizes of this plant. Most folks purchase the tree-size crepes and 'HACK' it down to the desired size not realizing that the Red Imp. and the Tightwad dwarf varieties were potential options.

The bottom line is that it pays to do your plant research before you purchase material. The University of Georgia provides a wonderful online publication entitled **A Compilation of Low-Maintenance Plants For Georgia Landscapes**. This is an excellent resource that I have shared with many. This publication and many others may be found at <http://www.caes.uga.edu/publications/>.