

A Checklist For Picking Plants in the Nursery

If a plant you bring home is already sickly, damaged or infested with pests or disease, it is only going to get worse. Most likely, it will die no matter what you do. It could also infect other plants in your garden. So picking plants in a nursery is primarily a process of eliminating the unhealthy ones. Here are 8 things to check before you buy a plant.

1. Avoid tall, spindly plants. They did not get enough sun when young and even if you give them lots of sun and TLC in your garden they will never be strong. This holds true for trees as well as smaller plants. Young trees with slender, weak trunks that will not stand up straight without staking should be avoided.

2. Look carefully for bugs and diseases. Turn over the leaves and look at the bottom of them to spot pests. Mottled, discolored, or chewed leaves are also an indicator of problems.

3. Pass up plants with yellow leaves -- unless yellow is their natural color. Yellowing leaves are an indication of poor plant nutrition, among other things.

4. Steer clear of plants with roots growing out of the pot. The plant is already root bound and its growth may never be good. Even root pruning may not help.

5. Do not buy plants in full bloom. Hey, you want them to bloom in your garden -- not in the nursery, right?

6. Watch out for plants with wilted leaves. They could just need a drink of water -- or it could be a symptom of something worse. Why take a chance?

7. Avoid shrubs and trees with broken or scarred branches or a severely lopsided shape. The plant may have received poor care at the wholesale growers and you may end up paying for it later. Shrubs and trees are big investments so don't risk your money!

8. Ask the staff at the nursery: "Does this plant grow well here?" It may seem to be an obvious question, but nurseries sell plants that have been requested by customers or shipped out from headquarters -- even if they are not suitable for our climate. (Azaleas are a prime example.) If you ask direct questions, you are likely to get a straight answers from the employee and a suggestion or two about what will grow well here.