

## **Trees and Parking Lots- Designing With Trees**

Everyone appreciates a shady parking lot when they return to their car after a trip to the grocery store. According to the journal *Pediatrics*, interior car temperatures can rise as much as 40 degrees Fahrenheit in one hour in the summer. A well placed tree in a parking lot can certainly help combat this problem. But did you realize that shade trees in parking lots provide other benefits besides keeping a vehicle cool? Trees in a parking lot can:

1. Help muffle noise.
2. Keep the air around the parking area cleaner by absorbing exhaust gasses and giving off pure oxygen.
3. Break up the massive expanse of a huge parking area and at the same time provide beauty and variety.
4. Control speed and direct traffic flow making the lot safer for pedestrian travel to and from cars.
5. Provide reference points for entrances and exits and help locate parked vehicles.
6. Reduce or slow surface runoff of water around the parking lot.

Parking lots are here to stay and many people are asking that they become more than simply a place to store cars in a sea of asphalt or concrete. Today, many developers are beginning to realize the commercial and aesthetic value of building parking areas that incorporate trees. Many lots are now being designed that incorporate trees and shrubbery. The ideal situation for creating a tree friendly parking lot is to design it using the existing trees. The soil around the existing trees can be protected from the application of soil sterilants and mechanical compaction that are often part of engineering techniques used when laying asphalt or concrete.

What trees should be planted around parking lots? A local arborist, landscape architect, forester, nursery or horticulture professional can give recommendations about what trees are best suited to local conditions. Selection should also be made based on these considerations too:

- Able to thrive in the existing soil.
- Have strong wood and not prone to breakage in wind.
- Fruitless or otherwise free of parts that fall and could damage vehicles, clog drains, or make pavement slippery.
- Tolerant to excessive heat, automobile exhaust and salt spray.

- Free of unacceptable levels of disease or insect pests that coat objects below with sticky honeydew (Southern Magnolias in Orange Beach were affected in the summer of 2006 with this).
- Fit the site aesthetically and serves an intended function (such as shade, buffer, focal point, etc.)

Trees can be an attribute to a business, institution or community when used in landscaping for parking lots. Studies have shown that parking lots with trees can attract business, enhance the workplace and even uplift the quality of life in a community.