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A Shopperâ€™s Walkthrough for Playground Trees by Laura Dudley

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Several environmental concerns determine the final layout of a school or park playground, from the durability of the soil to the amount of brush surrounding the area that can cause issues. Engineers worry about several issues, but perhaps one of the biggest causes for concern is whether the playground will have some type of shade to help shield it from the hot summer sun. The sun can cook the metal bars and plastic slides that make up a playground, and for small children, the blistering heat can make it difficult to play on, making shade a great ally of any outdoor play area. Planners may want to avoid specific trees and instead invest in plants that mature steadily and offer plenty of shade during the summer months.

What to Avoid

Never do you want to put a fruit tree or any tree that discards sap close to a playground, as youâ€™ll only be doubling the amount of maintenance needed for your outdoor play area. Aside from fruit and sap, avoid trees with needle-like leaves, such as a pine tree, which can drop several prickly needles and pine cones that can serve as a giant nuisance for kids. On the other hand, fruit trees can lure unwanted insects and cause fruit to rot, leaving behind a trail of nasty odors while unwanted animals will begin to make their way onto your commercial plastic outdoor playground.

What to Buy

You want to plant trees that have huge, overarching branches and offer plenty of shade to shield the play area, but you always want to take into consideration the time it may take for a tree to mature. The best example of the perfect tree for an outdoor playground for schools is perhaps the European Alder, which matures fast and can blanket an entire playground with shade. With their oval-shaped figures and lush green leaves, youâ€™ll get plenty of shade, and whatâ€™s wonderful about these plants that they can mature in almost any part of the country. With a frame and leaves that can go toe-to-toe with the European Alder, the Willow Oak is perhaps the next best tree to put close to a playground, as it can mature anywhere and offer plenty of shade for kids. Other equally wonderful trees include Golden Raintrees, American Beech trees, and Elm trees, each needing very little maintenance and growing well in most environments. Slides, chain link railing and metal bars will all be held at a manageable temperature during the summertime once these trees fully grow.

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