

Choosing a tree for your garden



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The planting of a tree in your garden is a big decision. Most modern gardens are quite small and it may be that you only have room for one tree and that it will become its main feature. Choosing the right tree for the space is therefore crucial. Trees are constantly changing living things that put us in touch with nature on any given day. They change with the seasons, play host to the natural world around us, provide interest, shade and freshness in what can sometimes be a hard urban environment. Where space permits however, the choice is different again and the need to balance size/scale and character with the surrounding environment becomes more important.

In rural locations and large gardens the needs of the tree must be considered to ensure survival over the course of its life which could, in the case of trees such as Oak, Chestnut or Yew, be 200-300 years or more. The tree must suit soil, climate, exposure and water levels and availability. This leaflet will guide you through the most important aspects to consider when choosing a tree.

Key considerations

Size

This is probably the most crucial factor in determining which tree is suitable for you. What size space have you got for a mature tree? Are you going to allow it to mature naturally or subject it to a pruning regime? Are you going to plant a rapidly growing, ultimately large tree because it has every characteristic you want and accept that you will have to remove it and replant in due course? Is the site close to buildings that may be

affected by a maturing tree either through shade, branches physically touching the building, debris blocking gutters or the potential for building movement? (This is generally only a problem on shrinkable clay soils). Most books and catalogues give size information based on periods through the tree's life. Ultimate sizes often refer to a tree growing in optimum conditions such as in its native habitat and may not reflect sizes outside that area.

Species characteristics

Consider what it is you most want from your tree.

Flowers - What colour and when?

Fruit - What colour, when, how long will it stay on the tree, is it a food source for wildlife or yourself?

Foliage - Evergreen or deciduous, persistent, what colour, how large, what shape, will it change colour in the autumn?

Bark - What colour, rough or smooth, peeling?

Habit - Upright or spreading? Rounded or pointed? Weeping or natural?

Function - What is it you want your tree to achieve? To be a focal point, to give a sense of scale, to screen a particular object, to give shade?

Suitability for site (cultural requirements)

- What is your soil type, acid or alkaline, heavy clay or light sandy loam? Some trees will only survive if they are planted in the right type of soil.
- How wet is your site, does it get waterlogged, what is the drainage like?
- How cold does it get, are you in a frost hollow, will your chosen tree survive?

- Are you exposed to harsh, cold, polluted or salt laden (coastal) winds? Some trees are particularly intolerant of these factors.
- Is the site in full southern sun, dappled shade or darkness?

Key

Size		Main characteristic	
s	up to 10m	f	flowers
m	10-20m	b	berries/pods/seeds
l	over 20m	bk	bark
		l	leaves (inc Autumn colour)
Habit		Cultural information	
r	rounded	lt	lime tolerant
s	spreading	li	lime intolerant
c	conical	s	shade tolerant
w	weeping	sh	shelter preferred
		d	damp tolerant

Broadleaves

	Size	Main characteristics	Habit	Main cultural requirements
Alders (<i>Alnus</i>)	m-l	f	c	d
Ash (<i>Fraxinus</i>)	m-l		r	
Beech (<i>Fagus</i>)	l		r	
Birch (<i>Betula</i>)	m-l	b	r	
Cherries (<i>Prunus</i>)	s-m	all	all	
Crab Apples (<i>Malus</i>)	s	all	all	
Dogwood (<i>Cornus</i>)	s-m	f-l	r	varies
False Acacia (<i>Robinia</i>)	s-l	f	r	lt-sh
Foxglove Tree (<i>Paulownia</i>)	m	f-l	r	sh
Hawthorns (<i>Crataegus</i>)	s	f-b	r-s	
Handkerchief Tree (<i>Davidia</i>)	m	f	c	sh
Hollies (<i>Ilex</i>)	s-m	l-b		s-lt

Honey Locust (<i>Gleditsia</i>)	m-l	l-b	r-c	s
Hornbeam (<i>Carpinus</i>)	m-l	bk-l	r-c	s
Hop Hornbeam (<i>Ostrya</i>)	m	f	r	
Horse Chestnut (<i>Aesculus</i>)	m-l	f-l-b	r-s	
Judas Tree (<i>Cercis</i>)	s	f-b	r	lt-sh
Katsura (<i>Cercidiphyllum</i>)	m	l	r-w	
Indian Bean Tree (<i>Catalpa</i>)	m	f-l-b	r-s	sh
Laburnum (<i>Laburnum</i>)	s	f-b	r	lt
Lilac (<i>Syringa</i>)	s	f	r	lt-sh
Lime (<i>Tilia</i>)	m-l		c-w	
Magnolia (<i>Magnolia</i>)	s-m	f	r-s	li-sh
Mountain Ash (<i>Sorbus</i>)	s-m	f-l-b	c	li-d
Mulberries (<i>Morus</i>)	s-m	b-bk	r-s	
Japanese Maples (<i>Acer</i>)	s-m	l	r	li-sh
Snake Bark Maples (<i>Acer</i>)	s-m	b-l	c	
Other Maples (<i>Acer</i>)	s-l	l-bk	s	
Oak (<i>Quercus</i>)	l		r-s	li-d
Pride Of India (<i>Koelreuteria</i>)	s	f-l		
Smoke Tree (<i>Cotinus</i>)	s	f-l	r	lt
Snowy Mespilus (<i>Amelanchier</i>)	s	f-l	r	lt
Pears (<i>Pyrus</i>)	s-m	f-l-b	c	
Persian Iron Wood (<i>Parrotia</i>)	s-m	l-b-k	sp	
Southern Beech (<i>Nothofagus</i>)	m-l	l	r-c	
Strawberry Tree (<i>Arbutus</i>)	s	all	r-s	
Sweet Chestnut (<i>Castanea</i>)	l	f-b-bk	r	
Sweetgum (<i>Liquidambar</i>)	m-l	l	c	
Tulip Tree (<i>Liriodendron</i>)	m-l	f-l	r	
Tupelo (<i>Nyssa</i>)	m	l	c	li-sh
Walnut (<i>Juglans</i>)	m-l	b	r-s	
Whitebeam (<i>Sorbus</i>)	s-m	f-b	r	lt
Wing Nut (<i>Pterocarya</i>)	m-l	b	r	
Zelkova (<i>Zelkova</i>)	m-l	l	r	

Conifers

Cedars (<i>Cedrus</i>)	l		c-s	sh
Cypresses (<i>Cupressus</i>)	m-l	l	c	lt
Dawn Redwood (<i>Metasequoia</i>)	m-l	l	c	
Ginkgo (<i>Ginkgo</i>)	m	l	c	
Larch (<i>Larix</i>)	m-l	l	c	li
Monkey Puzzle (<i>Arucaria</i>)	m	l	r	sh

Fruit Trees

Bryanston Gage (<i>dessert</i>)				
Buttery Door (<i>multi purpose</i>)				
Crimson King (<i>cider</i>)				
Melcombe Russet (<i>dessert/ cooker</i>)				
Runaway (Woodbine) (<i>cider</i>)				
Slack-ma-girdle (<i>dual purpose</i>)				
Syme's Seedling (<i>cooker</i>)				
Pine (<i>Pinus</i>)	s-l		r	
Silver Firs (<i>Abies</i>)	s-l	l-b	c	lt-sh
Western Red Cedar (<i>Thuja</i>)	m-l	l	c	lt
Yew (<i>Taxus</i>)	m	b-bk	r-s	



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