

Trees for Small Gardens

Every garden has space for a tree. Perhaps for beauty, for fresh fruit, for wildlife, for shade to sit under in our hotter summers, or to conceal the ugly shed next door.

Almost every government and non-governmental body promotes tree planting to suck carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, and that's brilliant IF the tree is in the right place and will grow to maturity. Otherwise the overall process of growing it in a nursery, transporting it around the country and soil disturbance during planting could release more greenhouse gases than it absorbs during its limited growth period.

Autumn is the best time to plant, but please do your research to decide which kind you want, and where to site it.

For example, do you want a deciduous tree that gives you shade in the summer and lets more light through in winter, or an evergreen that provides full screening all year round? There are many more options for flowers, fruit, autumn colour and winter structure with a deciduous tree.

Then there is the size: for most small gardens, trees with a final height of more than 5 metres will definitely outgrow their space and be difficult to manage (although columnar forms may fit). Do NOT rely on garden centre labels that only tell you the size and spread in 10 years; you are planting for the long-term.

Our native tree list at <https://readingcan.org.uk/growing-trees-for-carbon-storage-and-biodiversity/> gives the maximum height and preferred growing conditions and explains whether species can be pollarded to keep them growing beautifully in a smaller area, or are suitable as hedging plants when too large for a small garden as a standard tree.



It concentrates on native trees as these are beneficial to wildlife as well as people, but remember that a cultivar will probably have the same benefits for wildlife, but may be smaller and have far greater garden value. For example, *Crataegus lavalleyi* 'Carrierei' shown here has as many flowers, leaves and fruit for insects and birds than our native hawthorn, but is almost thornless and has a far more delicate leaf so nicer to look at and brush against than the native version.

Don't forget fruit trees. There is an apple tree for every position, space and personal taste depending upon variety chosen and rootstock. Some will fruit within a few years. A great one for small gardens is Red Falstaff which is self-fertile and has juicy crisp red apples (suitable for tempting Snow White).

A wider selection of trees for small gardens from around the world, and advice on planting and maintenance, is on

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/types/trees/small-garden>.

Finally, don't forget that some large shrubs can provide the same characteristics as a small tree and provide shade, screening, wildlife food and carbon storage. They just need some judicious pruning to make a good shape. Consider some of the tree-like cotoneasters or think about witch hazels or viburnams or wintersweet with amazing scent in winter.



Witch hazel ,growing as a multi –stemmed deciduous small tree with fantastic winter scented flowers and a good structure for growing a scented honeysuckle or two up in summer

