

Selecting Trees for your Garden Landscape

by Liz Ball and Rick Ray

QUICK...THINK GARDENING! What comes to mind immediately—flowers? vegetables?, shrubs?, seeds?, compost? Probably lots of these things. But, rarely trees. Many of us who are seriously afflicted with the gardening syndrome typically devote the majority of our passion and enthusiasm to choosing perennials and designing gardens to best display them, taking trees somewhat for granted. Yet, when you consider the designed garden areas in a yard, trees (or lack of) have enormous influence on the entire landscape. You would think that, having this role, trees would be not a second thought, but the first thought when thinking gardening.

Because many gardeners do not regularly choose and plant trees as a routine part of gardening, they are often less familiar with tree issues, terminology, and selection. So, the following discussion is an overview of these issues to help you select trees for your gardenscape.

For purposes of design and discussion, it is customary, when considering trees in landscapes, to distinguish between shade trees and ornamental trees. The term “shade tree” is used by municipal codes to mean very large trees, usually deciduous, planted in public spaces, college and corporate campuses, parks, and especially along roadsides. In general usage, the term means any tree species that grows to 60’ or more at maturity.

These oaks, maples, walnuts, lindens, zelkovas, and others grow to stately proportions, dignifying and protecting neighborhoods and communities. Some of us are lucky to have established shade trees on our properties. Their leaf canopies provide wonderful overstory for shade gardens.

Both the large shade trees, that are already in the yard, and the smaller ones, that you add to the plant palette, provide shade in varying degrees. But more importantly, they protect your entire residential ecosystem by controlling stormwater runoff, mitigating the climate, and offering habitat for many of the insects and other wildlife that are essential to a healthy garden landscape. Evergreens and deciduous trees are both valuable to establishing the sense of place and the character of your garden landscape. They all affect the structure, scope, and functioning of your garden landscape.

Ornamental Trees

While large shade trees are a huge asset to a property, only gardeners who have very large properties have much opportunity to choose and design on the scale of these trees. When it comes to buying trees for their garden landscape, gardeners typically buy small to medium-size ornamental ones, such as

dogwood, stewartia, crapemyrtle, witchhazel, redbud, and others. For many, buying even a small tree is somewhat daunting. Trees cost more than most perennials. They need more careful siting because they are not easy to transplant. They require some special expertise to plant properly. And there are so many wonderful ornamental trees to choose from it is hard to make a commitment.

Of course you want beauty. However, trees can multitask! They can also be functional while they are being beautiful. A single tree can stand beautifully alone as a specimen, accent, or anchor for a garden. Or, planted in various kinds of groupings, lovely trees can show off in groups in allees, groves, and buffers. At the same time, alone or grouped, they can simultaneously reduce noise, feed and shelter wildlife, preserve stream banks,



Koelreuteria paniculata in bloom.

photo ©Rick Ray

and control flooding and soil erosion. Then, of course, there are those that, while being beautiful, can do all this and also bear edible fruits and nuts.

So the challenge is to find a tree that simultaneously is beautiful to you, suits your site, and is an asset to your home ecosystem. Unless you have already seen and fallen in love



Native *Cornus florida* in bloom.

photo ©Rick Ray

with a certain tree species, it is a good idea to develop some criteria before you start hunting for the ideal tree for your garden. This will save you time and keep you focused on specifics.

At the Nursery or Garden Center

Trees require commitment. Planting them properly is critical to their futures, so you need to know how to do that. Young trees grow twice as fast when chosen and planted carefully and they will live twice as long as trees planted

carelessly. They require some attention in the first year or two, mostly watering.

If you are looking for large, older trees, they are available from landscaping firms at a premium price and, initially, they will not grow as fast as those planted at a younger age. Young ornamental (and fruit) trees are available in stores and catalogs in

three types of packaging—bare root, balled and burlapped (B&B), and containerized. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

Bare root trees are just that. They are simply a branched trunk ranging from 4–6' in height, with roots exposed at the other end. They are not always readily available at nurseries and garden centers, but mail-order nurseries offer them in a wide variety of species. They are very lightweight and easy to handle. They are also less expensive than young trees that are B&B or in containers. Bare root trees arrive with their roots wrapped in material to keep them moist and in a plastic bag. They should be stored in a cool place until planting time. Plant them fairly promptly in late winter or early spring while they are still dormant. To avoid planting too deeply, be sure the root flare at the base of the stem shows at, or slightly above, ground level after you put the soil in the hole over the roots. Bare root trees need staking for the first year or so to assure that they are stable. (The trees that PHS is distributing to communities for tree planting under its Tree Vitalize program are bare root).

Balled and burlapped (B&B) trees are substantial. At retail stores their trunks are typically 6–8' tall. Their roots are embedded in a ball of soil

that is wrapped in burlap and tied with string or surrounded by a wire cage. They are commonly sold at nurseries, and also are available at some garden centers. B&B trees are fairly expensive because there are usually delivery costs included due to their weight. The advantages of B&B trees are that they are usually a bit bigger, you can plant them all year round if the soil

Checklist for Choosing a Garden Tree

Here are some of the major issues to consider when selecting a tree for your gardenscape. Check all those that apply, then consider which issues are a top priority for you. Use this list when you research possible choices. Take it with you to the nursery or garden center.

- ___ Do I have mature height and width limitations for this tree?
- ___ Will this tree increase plant diversity in my landscape?
- ___ What do I want this tree to do for my garden landscape?
 - Screen view, light, noise
 - Feature foliage color or variegation
 - Be a focal point, specimen, or anchor
 - Provide flowers in spring; in summer
 - Provide foliage color in fall
 - Provide interesting bark
 - Block summer sun and/or admit winter sun
 - Hold the soil
 - Shelter/feed wildlife
 - Yield edible fruit (pawpaw, persimmon, apple, etc.)
 - Hold the soil
 - Provide material for indoor home decor
- ___ Does it matter if it is native or non-native?
- ___ Do I want deciduous or evergreen (needled or broad-leaved)?
- ___ Do I want a certain shape (pyramidal, vase, weeping, narrow)?
- ___ Does it need wet soil? Acid soil?
- ___ Does it need a male or female nearby to produce fruit?
- ___ Will it grow in a container?
- ___ Are there any special situations in my garden that the tree must accommodate (slope, overhead wires, other)?



Cornus florida 'Cherokee Sunset' in fruit and fall color.

photo ©Rick Ray

Recommended Trees for the Mid-Atlantic Region

The trees on this list are well suited for our local climate and soil conditions.

Small Evergreen Trees (Under 30')*

- *Ilex opaca*
'Angelica', 'Jersey Knight',
'Jersey Princess', 'Old
Heavy Berry', 'Wyetta'
American Holly
- *Juniperus virginiana* Emerald
Sentinel™
Eastern Red Cedar
- Magnolia grandiflora*
'Bracken's Brown Beauty',
'D.D. Blanchard', 'Edith
Brogue', 'Little Gem'
Southern Magnolia
- Picea omorika*
Serbian Spruce
- Pinus bungeana*
Lacebark Pine
- Pinus cembra*
Swiss Stone Pine
- Pinus densiflora* 'Umbraculifera'
Japanese Red Pine
- Pinus flexilis* 'Vanderwolf's
Pyramid'
Limber Pine
- Pinus parviflora* Glauca Group
Japanese White Pine
- Pinus thunbergii*
Japanese Black Pine
- Pinus flexilis* 'Vanderwolf's
Pyramid'
Limber Pine
- Thuja* 'Green Giant'
Hybrid Arborvitae
- Thuja occidentalis*
'Nigra', 'Pyramidalis',
'Smaragd', 'Techny'
American Arborvitae

Medium Evergreen Trees (30–60')*

- Abies concolor*
White Fir
- Abies nordmanniana*
Nordmann Fir
- Calocedrus decurens*
Incense Cedar
- Cedrus atlantica*
'Fastigiata', Glauca Group
Atlas Cedar
- Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*
'Glauca Pendula'
Alaskan Cedar
- Cryptomeria japonica*
'Benjamin Franklin',
'Yoshino'
Japanese Cedar

For detailed information about these trees, their uses, and care, visit www.hortincopia.com or see the Manual of Woody Landscape Plants by Michael Dirr, Easy Tree Guide by Keith Rushforth, or Encyclopedia of Trees by Hugh Johnson.

Springtime in Morocco

Ancient ruins, imposing kasbahs, mysterious medinas, towering mountains, and the endless desert will be the next destination for our forthcoming 2011 HPS/MAG overseas tour. Our tour will include gardens visits, markets, and cuisine, and will take us from Marrakech, then through the Atlas mountains to Essaouira, a charming town of medieval architecture on the coast, and Taroudant, a market town renowned for fine crafts.

Dates: March 29–April 7. Cost: 2480 GB Pound Sterling. Includes: flights from Gatwick to Marrakech and return, hotels, all meals (BLD), cooking classes, garden visits, all transfers, and all tips (includes Berber guides, drivers, & chambermaids.)

For a complete itinerary, including a booking form, please contact Joan Schmitt, 610-363-7693, joan912@verizon.net; or Alice Johnson, 610-269-4862, raj3k@verizon.net.

2011 Membership Directory

When you receive your membership renewal notice, please return your renewal as soon as possible so we can ensure your inclusion in the Directory. Also notify us of any e-mail or other changes since the 2010 Directory, bcubed32@aol.com.

Small Deciduous Trees (Under 30')*

- Acer campestre*
Hedge Maple
- Acer griseum*
Paperbark Maple
- *Aesculus pavia*
Red Buckeye
- *Amelanchier arborea*
Downy serviceberry
- *Amelanchier canadensis*
Shadblow/Serviceberry
- *Amelanchier laevis*
Allegheny Serviceberry
- *Betula populifolia*
'Whitespire Senior'
Gray Birch
- *Carpinus caroliniana*
American Hornbeam
- *Cercis canadensis*
Eastern Redbud
- *Cornus florida* 'Appalachian
Spring'
Flowering Dogwood
- Cornus kousa*
Chinese Dogwood
- Cornus mas* 'Golden Glory'
Cornelian Cherry
- Crataegus viridis* 'Winter
King'
Green Hawthorn
- Davidia involucrata*
Dovetree
- *Franklinia alatamaha*
Franklinia
- *Halesia carolina*
Carolina Silverbell
- Maackia amurensis*
Amur maackia
- *Magnolia virginiana*
Sweetbay Magnolia
- Magnolia x soulangeana*
Saucer Magnolia
- Malus* spp.
Crabapple—assorted
disease-resistant
varieties
- *Ostrya virginiana*
American Hophornbeam
- Prunus* 'Okame'
Okame Cherry
- Prunus serrulata*
Oriental Cherry
- Prunus subhirtella*
'Autumnalis'
Higan Cherry
- Stewartia pseudocamellia*
Japanese Stewartia
- Syringa reticulata*
Japanese Tree Lilac

Medium Deciduous Trees (30–60')*

- Acer buergerianum*
Trident Maple
- Aesculus x carnea*
'Briotii', 'Fort McNair'
Red Horsechestnut
- Alnus* species
Alder
- Betula lenta*
Sweet Birch
- *Betula nigra* 'Heritage'
River Birch
- Carpinus betulus* 'Fastigiata'
European Hornbeam
- Cercidiphyllum japonicum*
Katsura Tree (use male)
- *Cladrastis kentukea*
Yellowwood
(not near street)
- *Gleditsia tricanthos f. inermis*
'Imperial', 'Moraine',
'Shademaster', 'Skyline'
Honeylocust
(thornless; no fruits)
- *Oxydendrum arboreum*
Sourwood
- Parrotia persica*
Persian Ironwood
(single stem)
- Prunus sargentii* 'Columnaris'
Sargent's Cherry
- Quercus acutissima*
Sawtooth Oak
- *Quercus imbricaria*
Shingle Oak
- *Quercus phellos*
Willow Oak
- Ulmus parvifolia*
Lacebark Elm

• Denotes native trees. They are especially recommended.

*The height categories listed are for effective landscape height, not the actual height that the trees might attain at maturity.

is not frozen, and they generally do not need staking. However, planting them is somewhat more complicated because the burlap or wire must be at least partially removed and sometimes the root flare is covered by the soil on the rootball which must be removed to establish correct planting depth.

Containerized plants are convenient. The young trees are planted in potting medium in a nursery container. Available from about 6–8' tall, they are moderately priced and are relatively easy to bring home from the nursery or garden center yourself. A great number of tree varieties are available in containers in nurseries and garden centers and they can be planted any time all year as long as the soil can be worked. Planting containerized trees is relatively straightforward, but it is important to probe the potting medium before planting to be sure that the roots have not wrapped around themselves

while inside the pot and to check to see if the root flare at the base of the trunk is visible. Often soil is piled on a containerized tree when it is in its pot, literally burying the stem for several inches. Remove all extra soil so that the root flare is visible at, or a bit above, ground level when you set the tree in its hole. Also, it is a good idea to mix loose potting medium into the soil from the hole before filling in around the tree roots to provide a transition to encourage the roots to venture outward into real soil.

The time to select and plant a new tree is always last year. This is especially true when one of your existing trees is in obvious decline. Do not wait until it dies to replace it. Put its replacement in nearby now. It will be fully established and growing vigorously when you lose your old one. It is also true when you are contemplating a new landscape design.

Get your trees in first and soonest and they will grow and thrive while you take your time developing the area around them.



Liz Ball is a garden writer, lecturer, photographer, and teacher. She has written seven books and coauthored nine others over a 25-year career in horticulture, as well as written numerous articles for many horticulture magazines. **Rick Ray** retired from teaching ornamental horticulture at Delaware Valley College after 20 years and has taught at the Arboretum School of the Barnes Foundation for 20 years. He is also a lecturer and garden photographer.

Residents of Marple Township, Liz and Rick formed the Marple Township Tree Committee and began earning certification in 2006 as a Tree City USA® site to address the alarming decline in Marple's community forest due to the lack of knowledge about trees and their benefits on the part of both residents and township leaders. Under their leadership, the committee of seven members has planted more than 125 trees in the township in the last year and a half.

Maine Coast Trip

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there (Andrew painted Christina's World nearby). I loved the recent, room-sized paintings by contemporary artist Alex Katz and the 19th-century hooked rugs.



photo ©Bessy Hansell

Perennial garden at Frogs Leap

On an afternoon stroll through five gardens in Cushing, we saw many ways of joining house to river. The absolute zenith of the trip was Frogs Leap, the inviting 75-acre oceanfront garden of Dr. Elsie Freeman. A glowing bride of just a week, she led us through the island estate inspired, in part, by English cottage gardens. You can see the ocean, but must walk through perennial heaven to reach it. There are surprises. A climb through mossy woodland dotted with glacier-deposited rocks called erratics

reveals a pristine, though waterless, Japanese water garden designed by Elsie's new husband. Visitors cross on a raised walk of octagonal rocks so as not to disturb the raked sand ocean waves. Frog sculptures pop up in and out of water features throughout the garden and in front of the deep-porched shingle house.

I would move in a minute if I could live in the gazebo on Carol Donnelly's long white wraparound porch in York. Perched on a bluff overlooking the York tidal river that pours into the ocean near there, you watch lobster boats and sailboats, kayaks, and motorcraft change color with the advancing day. An armchair made from lobster traps is a showstopper near the entrance.

Braveboat Harbor Farm, Calvin and Cynthia Hosner's elegant oceanfront estate, included a formal vegetable patch fronted by huge, glowing orange gloriosa daisies, espaliered pears and apples begging to be tasted, and an ancient graveyard overlooking the water.

We didn't have enough time at the New England Wildflower Society's Garden in the Woods near Framingham, MA, where we

spent our last night, but it was a welcome rest stop on the long way home. Scarlet lobelias smoldered around a turtle pond in the woods, where pitcher plants showed their peculiar blossoms and late-blooming azaleas were in flower. Shopping was excellent and I brought back a crate full of native plants.

Kudos, as always, to Joan Schmitt and Alice Johnson, who arranged everything, and to bus driver Tony Scott, who got us there safely. Pictures tell the story better.



photo ©Bessy Hansell

Porch and gazebo at Carol Donnelly's garden.

Come to the annual potluck supper on November 13 to see a slide presentation of the Maine trip and also the trip to Wales/the Cotswolds, plus other 2010 HPS/MAG events.