

Right Tree, Right Place

Choosing and Planting Trees



Guide Overview

This guide is to help you pick the right tree to plant in your garden and help on how to care for your trees.

Planting trees, particularly native varieties, benefits your local ecosystem, helping insects and other animals to survive. Trees provide protection and shelter for many birds and mammals. Their nuts, seeds, and fruits are essential food sources for British wildlife. Planting trees also helps to combat climate change. Trees are effective at storing carbon dioxide, they protect the soil from erosion, and they can help to capture rainwater which reduces our vulnerability to flooding.

This document was originally created by Southway Homes, City of Trees and Barcham Trees and we thank them for allowing us to adapt their guide for the West Midlands.

Thank you to Frank P Matthews Tree Shop for providing the photos for many of the trees in this guide. You can find the shop at Berrington Court, Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire, WR15 8TH. Call them on 01584 812800.



Frank P Matthews
Tree Shop

Before you get started

Safety Precautions

Below-ground service plans should be assessed wherever possible prior to any digging. If there is any uncertainty at all, digging should be done with insulated spades and operatives wearing rubber boots.

When to plant?

Trees are best planted from November to March. This is when they are dormant and so gives the young trees the best chance to have a full season of becoming established come Spring.

Where to plant your tree

It is recommended that trees are planted away from fence lines and built structures to avoid shading issues with your neighbours and concerns over root damage, however, the root spread from the trees we are recommending should be relatively small. Planting locations should always be agreed beforehand with your landlord. Different trees like different growing conditions ranging from full sunlight to shade, wet soil to well drained. Trees should generally be planted in the open, and not under the shade of other trees, to give them the best chance of becoming established.



Planting your tree

An exploration of the soil conditions is recommended to get a better understanding of what kind of soil substrate the tree roots will be growing into and to determine whether there are issues with contamination or poor drainage and what the organic content of the soil is.

A current garden may not have always been 'green' and could previously have hosted a building which may mean that there are significant levels of inert material (bricks and stone) and even voids where cellars may once have been.

Dig the planting pit to the correct depth - we recommend a planting pit slightly deeper than the container that the tree comes in, unless you have specific issues with drainage throughout your site which may require a deeper pit with some stone added to the bottom to help stop the tree sitting in water and the roots drowning.

The width of the planting pit should be at least one and a half times as large as the root-ball/container and ideally 1.5m – 2m, this will make it easier for the roots to spread out and stop the tree becoming pot bound.

The tree pit should contain the following components:

- If the soil excavated from the soil is not full of brick or stone, then re-use this in the tree pit making sure that the soil dug out goes back in the order in which it was removed. If the soil is very poor, then use a topsoil in the top third of the tree pit and a sub soil in the remainder of the hole. For further information on topsoil and sub soil explore the internet there's plenty of guidance out there!
- Drainage base of stone but not limestone as many trees do not like alkaline conditions
- Mulch mat and or mulch layer for retaining water and preventing weed growth – but leave a mulch free collar of approximately 5cm all the way around the base of the tree
- Strimming collar to prevent damage to the base of the tree during grass cutting
- A stake connected to the tree with a rubber bung and strap to help stabilise the tree from high winds or accidental damage - It is very important to check the strap several times each year to make sure that it does not become tight enough to rub the bark or dig into it as this will damage the tree. Loosen the tie as the tree grows in width and remove the strap and the stake after a few years once the tree is firmly anchored in the ground.

Choosing the right tree for your garden

Some tree species are slow growing and might initially fit very well in a small garden but over time could dwarf your space, blocking out light and potentially damage the foundations of your house. See [what to avoid planting here](#).

Fortunately, there are plenty of tree species and cultivars with a compact habit that won't outgrow their surroundings. The following list is not exhaustive but sets out a selection of what are considered to be 'appropriate' trees for gardens. The trees have been selected based on their relatively small dimensions that range from 1- 6 meters across (canopy spread) to 3 – 10 meters in height, which means that there should be a suitable tree for planting in most soft landscaped garden sizes.





Species: Camperdown Elm
(*Ulmus glabra Camperdownii*)

Description: The Camperdown Elm is a form of Wych Elm. A small weeping tree with a dome shaped head; it looks good growing in a lawn in parks and gardens. It remains neat and compact, and is generally considered to be resistant to Dutch Elm Disease but only because it doesn't attain the height to attract the infecting beetle.

Mature height: 5-10m

Crown spread: 2-3m

Tolerance: Will thrive in soft landscaped areas.

Native: Yes

Additional info: Produces clusters of attractive hop like flowers in the spring .



Species: Whitebeam – Clone
(*Sorbus aria Mitchellii*)

Description: This small tree with a rounded habit has dark green leaves with white undersides that can get up to 15cm long and broad. A great tree for providing contrast in a garden environment.

Mature height: 5-8m

Crown spread: 2-4m

Tolerance: Thrives on most free draining soils and will do well in hard or soft landscaped areas.

Native: No (Himalayas/Western China)

Additional info: This tree is good for the honey bees and provides lots of nectar throughout the summer months.



Species: Mongolian Lime
(*Tilia mongolica*)

Description: This tree is most unlike the general look of the rest of the Lime family and is also aphid resistant. It has all the durability of Lime, but is of a size that makes it ideal for urban planting where space is limited. It has small, serrated, glossy, green leaves, which are similar to those of ivy. These leaves then turn to a clear and delicate yellow in autumn.

Mature height: 7-10m

Crown spread: 2-4m

Tolerance: Will do well in hard and soft landscaped areas.

Native: No (Mongolia)

Additional info: Requires little maintenance and as the leaves are so small there is not much leaf litter to contend with.



Species: Ornamental Cherry
(*Prunus umineko*)

Description: This flowering Cherry is a very good tree for the urban environment. It has a narrow, columnar form, which broadens with age and is a very good choice for hard or soft landscaped areas with restricted access. Single white flowers are produced in April, along with foliage, which colours very well in Autumn.

Mature height: 5-10m

Crown spread: 2-4m

Tolerance: A robust and vigorous tree that thrives best on free draining soils.

Native: No (Asia)

Additional info: A great tree for bees.



Species: Rowan
(*Sorbus aucuparia*)

Description: Rowan is a fast-growing small tree, with their leaves turning a bright orange-red colour in autumn, with new leaves appearing in April. Flower blossom appears in May or early June and are creamy white in colour. The flowers attract pollinators, such as bees and the flowers turn into bright red round fruits once pollinated.

Mature height: 10-15m

Crown spread: 2-4m

Tolerance: It grows well on most soils and has been a great favourite in the UK for many years.

Native: No (Asia)

Additional info: Good for bees and the fruits are eaten by birds.



Species: Hazel
(*Corylus avellana*)

Description: Also known as the cobnut, this is our native Hazel. A small tree with rounded habit, it looks particularly striking in the early spring when it is adorned with its long yellow catkins. The tree produces nuts in the autumn.

Mature height: 3-5m

Crown spread: 2-4m

Tolerance: A very good choice for gardens, parks and wildlife, but not hard landscaped areas.

Native: Yes

Additional info: Good for bees and wildlife in general.



Species: Crab Apple
(*Malus Sylvestris*)

Description: Crab apples trees can vary in appearance and there are many varieties. They are popular in gardens as the flowers attract pollinators and flower over a long period of time. They make great trees for small gardens. The fruits come in yellow, orange and red colours which are edible and great for making crab apple jelly!

Mature height: 10m

Crown spread: 2-4m

Tolerance: Does well in most soils, including very dry and wet soils.

Native: Yes

Additional info: Birds and mammals eat the apples the tree produces with the flower blossom attracting bees.



Species: Hawthorn
(*Crataegus laevigata* Pauls Scarlet)

Description: Where space is at a premium this is an ideal choice as it is a very upright tree that keeps its shape into maturity. This Hawthorn becomes smothered in stunning pink flowers in May and is a good choice for urban environments as it is tolerant to pollution. The abundance of flowers make this a great tree for pollinators.

Mature height: 5-8m

Crown spread: 1-3m

Tolerance: It does well in most soils, including very dry and wet soils.

Native: Yes

Additional info: As root development can be slow, moderate pruning is recommended in the first few years after planting to achieve good anchorage. Staking or underground guying should be considered.





Choosing fruit trees

When selecting fruit trees, it is more important to get the correct rootstock than the variety.

The rootstock dictates how large a tree will grow. Most fruit trees will have the rootstock listed on the label. Smaller garden spaces are most suited to apple trees grafted on to M9 or M26 rootstock, larger gardens will accommodate MM106.

Small gardens should avoid the Bramley variety as it always grows large, regardless of the rootstock. For pears, Quince A or Quince C rootstock will suffice. Avoid *Pyrus communis* (common pear) rootstock as it can become a huge tree. Torinel rootstock is recommended for stone fruit varieties except cherry where Gisela 5 (or G5) is preferred. For more detail, see Royal Horticultural Guidance at <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=359>



Apple trees – Apply Red Windsor

If you are new to growing apple trees, Red Windsor is an easy and reliable variety. It is a good choice for difficult situations where light is limited. It is self-fertile, so there is no need to worry about pollination partners. It grows naturally in a neat and tidy fashion and crops heavily. The apples can be picked over several weeks so you don't have to deal with a glut*.

Red Windsor is a naturally small / weak-vigour tree and grows in a compact style, so it is a good choice if you are short of space.
For a small sized tree of this variety (1.5m-2.5m after 10 years) choose a 2-year bush-trained bare-root tree M9 rootstock
For a medium sized tree of this variety (2m-3m after 10 years) choose a 2-year bush-trained bare-root tree M26 rootstock
For a large sized tree of this variety (3m-4m after 10 years) choose a 2-year bush-trained bare-root tree MM106 rootstock.

Plum trees - Plum Jubilee

If you are new to growing fruit trees, plum trees make an excellent choice. Plum trees are easy to grow - usually easier than apples and pears - and require little training or pruning. Plums flower quite early in spring, so locations that are prone to frosts are best avoided (or choose a late-flowering or frost-resistant variety). Plums thrive in most conditions, but they prefer water-retentive soils, and mulching is important for plum trees**. This is a self-fertile variety and suitable for beginners. It is similar to Victoria plum but Jubilee has larger fruits. It crops heavily and is a very good eating and cooking plum. The flowers have good frost resistance.

* <https://www.orangeippintrees.co.uk/trees/apple-trees/mid-season-eating-apples/red-windsor>

** <https://www.orangeippintrees.co.uk/trees/plum-trees/dessert-plums/jubilee>

Cherry trees

These are best planted in a sunny, sheltered location in the garden.

Stella Cherry tree

This is a self-fertile variety and suitable for beginners. It is easy to grow and productive. The large dark red cherries are very juicy and sweet, with a typical cherry flavour. For a medium sized tree of this variety (2m-3m after 10 years) choose a bare-root tree Gisela 5 rootstock For a large sized tree of this variety (3m-4m after 10 years) choose a bare-root tree bare-root tree Colt rootstock

Lapins Cherry tree

This is a smaller tree than Stella and is one of the best cherry varieties for the UK garden. It is self-fertile, heavy cropping, quite vigorous, and easy to grow. For a small sized tree of this variety (1.5m-2.5m after 10 years) choose a bare-root tree Gisela 5 rootstock. If you have more experience with growing fruit trees, other varieties of fruit tree are available to select. Orange Pippin Fruit Trees web site has a lot of information to aid selection

<https://www.orangeippintrees.co.uk>

Planting for wildlife

There are many flowers and hedges that you can plant in your garden to support wildlife, as well as trees. A garden filled with colourful nectar-rich flowers is a haven for nature and garden hedges can provide valuable shelter for wildlife.

See the RSPB website for creating a wildlife friendly garden [here](#)



Caring for your trees

Newly planted trees will need regular TLC so they develop healthy, mature trees. No matter the size of species, following these simple steps will give your trees the best chance of success.

Mulching

Mulching involves applying an organic layer, known as mulch, to the surface of the soil surrounding a tree using materials such as woodchip, straw or fallen leaves. You can also use mulch mats which are pegged down, however these are less easily available.

The purpose of this is to provide additional nutrients for the tree when materials break down and to form a barrier layer on the soil to prevent the growth of other plants and therefore act as a barrier to weeds.

Newly planted trees can be mulched any time of year. Once trees are established, mulching can be done in late winter through to spring to protect from frost, trap moisture and act as a buffer against hot weather when summer arrives. Before mulching, clear the surrounding area of weeds then apply a mulch layer approximately 2 inches deep around the base of the tree and spread with your hands or a rake so it is level. Make sure that no mulch is touching the tree as this can cause damage to the tree.

We would discourage the use of weed killers around trees. This is common practice by grounds maintenance companies and people may get the impression that this is a good thing to do. Young trees and tree species with thin bark can be damaged by direct contact with over spray and uptake by roots is not going to be in anyway beneficial to the tree.

Weeding

Any other plants growing in the immediate area are going to compete for nutrients, water and space which can negatively affect your tree. If allowed to grow, these plants can also eventually cast shade on young trees, reducing the amount of light they receive.

For this reason, each tree should have a 1m diameter or more weed free area around it and an area should be cleared of weeds before a tree is planted. Weeding can be easily done by pulling weeds out at the roots by hand or using simple hand tools such as a hoe. As previously mentioned, mulch may also be used to limit weed growth.

Weeds will grow fastest in spring and summer so weeding will need to be done more frequently during this time but how often you will need to do this will depend on conditions and the type of weeds present.



Watering

Prior to planting, trees that are kept in pots will need regular watering to ensure they stay healthy. However, after planting, trees should adapt to their environment and watering shouldn't be necessary except during periods of warm weather.

If trees have been planted for less than 6 months, after 3 to 4 days of warm weather they will need watering. The amount of water that each tree needs will vary according to size and species, but enough water should be used to sufficiently soak the soil around the roots.

Water trees slowly to make sure water is draining through the soil, water during cooler parts of the day and repeat every few days if hot weather persists without rainfall.



Register your tree on the Virtual Forest

The West Midlands Virtual Forest is your opportunity to get involved in making our region a greener, happier and healthier place to live.

Register your tree on the website, to show how you are helping to make the West Midlands and greener, happier, healthier place to live.

<https://www.wmvirtualforest.co.uk>



WEST MIDLANDS
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We need to make sure that the right tree is established in the right place, using the right method, for the right reasons, and with the right aftercare.

Read our 'Right Tree, Right Place' principles [here](#)

We hope that this guide will help you to follow these principles when planting in your own gardens and we look forward to seeing your tree registered on the Virtual Forest.