

Deciduous Trees for Winter Planting

With autumn's vibrant hues still in mind, winter is planting time for deciduous trees.

Apart from the temporary nuisance factor that the autumn leaf drop can be (just think of all the good that composted leaf litter will do for your soil), deciduous trees are enormously useful things to have in your garden. They provide valuable shade in summer while letting warmth and light through in winter. Deciduous trees provide the loveliest kind of umbrella for an outdoor living area. As a cooling screen to protect the west side of a house from hot afternoon sun they are highly recommended.

The best way to enhance and highlight the changing seasons in a garden is to plant deciduous trees, which have the delightful habit of changing their clothes every two or three months: luminous new spring growth, an annual show of flowers, serene green foliage for summer, bright yellows, oranges and reds for autumn, colourful berries or fruit, and not to forget the picturesque patterns and textures of bare winter branches. With gardeners everywhere rediscovering the joys of home-grown food, trees that produce edible crops are increasingly popular.

During June and July, nurseries and garden centres present a comprehensive line up of pip and stone fruit varieties plus a wide range of ornamental trees. For the most part, winter offerings are freshly dug from the open ground for sale as dormant bare root trees for winter planting.

Country gardeners with the luxury of space are spoiled for choice. In a town-sized garden where there may only be room for one small tree, deciding on the right one requires much pre-purchase deliberation.

The challenge is to hit upon the variety that best meets our needs in a desirable time frame, without growing too big. Bear in mind that the height given on a label is often a ten-year estimate. In a warm rainy climate with near perfect soil, that ten years growth will often convert to five. Impatient gardeners should also remember that a fast growing tree is often more difficult to maintain, and has a limited life span.

Fast and spreading

If you have ever grown a bean plant from seed you will appreciate how fast a legume can grow. Members of that same plant family, the Silk tree (*Albizia*), the honey locust (*Gleditsia*), and pretty yellow *Robinia* 'Frisia' are three quick growing beauties, easily accommodated in an average suburban section where they can be trimmed for size control. The silk tree spreads up to eight metres wide, a wonderful

sun umbrella with its fuzzy pink flowers. *Gleditsia* 'Sunburst' has lacy green foliage overlaid with golden summer growth. Slightly smaller growing is *Gleditsia* 'Ruby lace' in shades of red and bronze. Robinia 'Frisia' is loved for its buttery yellow foliage and light airy appearance.

Melia azedarach (Indian Bead Tree) can grow quite large but is popular for the average suburban garden, with glossy dark green foliage and an attractive umbrella shape. Clusters of fragrant spring flowers are followed by attractive yellow berries, which attract birds.

Small flowering trees

Spectacular flowering cherries light up a spring garden with their fluffy pink and white blossom. The smaller cultivars such as *Prunus campanulata* 'Pink Cloud' and *Prunus subhirtella* 'Falling Snow' will fit the most compact gardens. 'Amanogawa' is tall and narrow, just 1.5m wide.

The Japanese flowering crab (*Malus floribunda*) is a picture in earliest spring with wide arching branches smothered in shades of red, pale pink and white. New Zealand bred crab-apples, *Malus* 'Tom Matthews' and *Malus* 'Jack Humm' follow their spring blossom with a colourful autumn/winter display of baby apples. *Cercis* 'Avondale' with its bright pink flowers, and the lovely flowering dogwoods (*Cornus* varieties) are magnificent in a cold climate.

The first magnolias emerge from their beautiful furry buds as early as July, with breathtaking displays continuing through till mid spring. The many varieties include those suitable for smaller gardens. *Magnolia soulangeana* cultivars have a natural low branching habit with masses of tulip-shaped blooms perching on bare branches. The smallest, Star magnolia (*magnolia stellata*) has a low branching rounded habit, up to 2m tall.

Plant a kowhai (*Sophora*) tree you will not only enjoy a bright yellow spring blossom, but also the delight of visiting tuis. Extra compact kowhai cultivars make superb container trees.

Autumn colour for small gardens

The many cultivars of Japanese maple (*Acer palatum*) offer a wide choice of colours and growth habits. Favourites include *Acer palmatum* 'Atropurpureum', crimson in spring deepening to dark black-red in summer then scarlet in autumn. 'Osakazuki', a very old variety, is famous for its intense autumn red. 'Katsura' unfolds yellow in spring, turns green for summer, then fiery yellow and orange in autumn. Ruby leaf maple, 'Shindeshojo', sends out spring shoots of deep ruby red which turn orange and pink in summer, then bright red and orange for autumn.

A single Japanese maple makes a wonderful lawn tree or garden feature under-planted with moisture lovers such as ferns and azaleas. The smaller varieties, such as the *Acer palmatum dissectum* varieties, will grow well in large containers.

Maples prefer well-drained, cool moist soil. Their delicate foliage needs shelter, so a small walled courtyard is ideal. Too much shade will result in less vibrant colour, but avoid leaf scorch in hot climates by planting where there is morning sun only. Add plenty of compost at planting time.

Other trees for autumn colour in a small garden are *Prunus*, *Persimmon*, *Cotinus* (smoke bush), *Nyssa sylvatica*, and *Stachyurus praecox*.

Big and beautiful

Where there is space for a large tree, there are many options, but it is important to choose a tree suited to the soil and climate.

Easy in any climate in any reasonable soil, the ginkgo is among the most beautiful trees with a stunning pyramidal shape and autumn colour that lights up like a beacon. Ginkgos relatively slow growth rate makes them well suited to the average sized garden. Purchase a grafted male variety to avoid fleshy fruit that makes a smelly mess.

Copper Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Purpurea') grows in any average soil in any climate, but is not one for the coast. Slowly but surely this beautiful tree grows into a majestic rounded pyramid. The colour and texture of its foliage is unmatched by any other tree.

One of many beautiful oak species, scarlet oak (*Quercus coccinea*) is loved for its bright red autumn colour, and a spreading open branch structure that allows plenty of light through. Fabulous in colder climates, it is easy to grow and drought tolerant once established.

Claret Ash (*Fraxinus oxycarpa* 'Raywoodii') is a fast growing favourite with deep red autumn foliage. It will tolerate boggy soils and urban streetscapes and revels in a cold climate.

Liquidambar styraciflua produces good autumn colour even in a mild climate and it is reliable in most soils. For good autumn colour it is best to buy a named variety as seedlings are quite variable.

The uniquely shaped leaves of the tulip tree (*Liriodendron*) glow butter yellow in autumn. Quickly growing into a huge pyramid *Liriodendron* is happy in a wide range of climates and soils.

Winter is a great time to plant trees. Invest in top quality, well-grown plants and prepare the soil well. But avoid digging when the soil is very wet.

Planting trees

1. Before planting, water the potting mix thoroughly or immerse in a bucket of water until thoroughly saturated.
2. Prepare the soil well, digging in lots of compost. Aim for a generous volume

of crumbly, freshly dug, humus enriched soil around the tree roots. Dig a hole at least twice as wide and one and a half times the depth of the size of the plants container. Back fill to the depth of the container, firming down gently.

3. Fertiliser is an optional extra but will generally give faster, healthier results. Exact quantities depend on what you are planting and the state of your soil. Slow release fertiliser is best.
4. If the plant has been in its container too long, the roots may be tightly packed and spiraling around in the shape of the pot (“root-bound”). If so, gently loosen and lightly prune the roots, removing damaged parts with a clean cut.
5. Generally the tree should be positioned in its hole at the same level as it was in its pot. (Grafted plants like roses or citrus trees need to be placed so that the graft is above the soil).
6. Position stakes before back filling with soil. This saves the roots from being damaged by driving stakes in later. Staking is important for young trees as wind movement prevents roots from becoming established properly. Space two or three stakes evenly around the tree. Tie with flexible ties.
7. Firm the soil around the root ball gently with your hand or foot as you go.
8. Water thoroughly to make sure the soil is snugly in contact with the roots.
9. Finish with layer of organic mulch, keeping it clear of the trunk.

Suggested Products: Living Earth Compost, Premium Mulch, Bark Mulch, Reharvest Coloured Mulch, Living Earth Garden Mix & Potting Mix are available from all Central Landscape Supplies yards in bag and bulk