

Choosing Small Trees for Small Yards



Photo to be credited to Texas A&M University : Many types of Japanese maples are wonderful small trees for the small landscape.

Brandy Cowley-Gilbert and her husband Ted own Just Fruits and Exotics Nurseries just south of Crawfordville. They are members of the UF-IFAS Leon County Extension Advisory Committee. <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>

December 14, 2003

One of the major concerns facing many of today's gardeners is how to fit a flowering or shade tree into the tiny yards of modern suburbs. Choosing the right plant material is crucial to the success of any landscape project, and trees especially require extra thought. Although it is tempting to plant a large and fast growing tree to provide some instant shade, this can lead to future problems. Fast growing trees will quickly outgrow their allotted space, shading out nearby beds and lawns, both yours and your neighbors. If planted too close to driveways or foundations, large trees can damage concrete with their powerful roots.

Fortunately, the range of small to medium-sized trees that grow in our area is immense. There are plenty of great trees to choose from, no matter what your personal landscape style may be. Here are some of our personal favorites for various landscape types.

Native Landscapes: This group contains low maintenance, easy to grow trees that will draw wildlife to your garden.

- Chickasaw Plum (*Prunus angustifolia*). Grows 15 to 25 feet. Provides a fantastic spring display of pure white blossoms. Birds and squirrels love the fruit. Choose a variety like "Guthrie" that won't root sucker.
- Ashi Magnolia (*Magnolia ashei*). Enormous leaves and huge white, fragrant blooms. A great choice for shady yards. Grows to 20 feet.
- Dahoon Holly (*Ilex cassine*). An evergreen with a neat, compact form. Winter brings an outstanding display of bright red berries that birds love. Grows to 30 feet.
- Wax Myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*). Another favorite of our avian friends. Lovely, rounded form is evergreen. Grows to 20 feet.
- Fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*). A charming old Southern tree, also called Greybeard. Spring brings large, heavy clusters of long, white, fringe-like blooms. Grows to 30 feet.

If you're interested in a more traditional landscape look, the following trees provide big-time elegance in small packages.

- Taiwan Cherry (). One of the few long-lived flowering cherries for the Deep South . Delicate, fuchsia

Choosing Small Trees for Small Yards

pink blossoms in spring. Grows to 30 feet.

- Japanese Magnolia (*Magnolia liliiflora* x *Magnolia stellata*). Some of these are really small growers. “Ann” grows to 15 feet, with small, purple tinged white flowers. “Jane” reaches 20 feet, and has cupped, tulip-shaped white and purple flowers in early spring.
- Japanese Maple (*Acer palmatum*). Available in many forms, from 10 to 20 feet, weeping, upright, or layered. Leaves can be lobed, thread-like, or lacy. Be sure to get a variety suited to our area.
- Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*). Crape Myrtles are available in an incredible range of sizes and bloom colors. Many provide fall foliage shows as well. Just pick a size and color, and chances are there’s a variety to fill the bill.

For those who are into the edible landscape, here’s a roster of small trees that can yield big harvests.

- Citrus. Glossy evergreens provide fragrant blossoms and sweet, tangy treats. Choose from these super cold-hardy varieties for easy care: Changshi Tangerine, Chinnotto Orange, US 119 Orange, Tiwanica Lemon, and Meiwa and Nagami Kumquat.
- Figs grow to be beautiful 10 to 15 foot trees, with an open, multi-trunked look. Leaves are handy if caught outdoors while underclothed.
- Persimmons are one of the most spectacular sights in the fall. Large, leathery leaves turn deep red to bright orange, and the bright red/orange fruit often holds on the tree after leaf-drop, looking like holiday ornaments. Most varieties reach 15 to 20 feet.
- Loquats are very tropical looking evergreens with broad, dagger-shaped leaves. These 25 foot growers can be trained as broad screens or stately standards. Loquats have fragrant blooms and apricot/peach flavored fruit.

And if you’re looking for something a little different, or just plain weird, please consider the following.

- Chaste Tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*). This 15 footer has deeply cut, maple-like leaves. Long spikes of deep purple blooms appear throughout the summer.
- Weeping Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria* ‘Pendula’). This super-tough, easy to grow tree has such character! Twisted, weeping form, with a fantastic show of red winter berries.

That’s just a small sample of the Mighty-Mite trees we can grow here in North Florida . As they say, good things come in small packages.

###