

*Taylor's* 50 *BEST*  
Trees



*Easy Plants for More Beautiful Gardens*



TAYLOR'S 50 BEST

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# *Trees*

*Easy Plants for More Beautiful Gardens*



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Pownal, Vermont

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.  
ISBN 0-395-87332-0

Printed in the United States of America

WCT 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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# *Trees*

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*Frances Tenenbaum, Series Editor*



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

*Boston • New York 1999*



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# INTRODUCTION

Trees are the most dominant and permanent elements in the landscape. They determine the framework of the garden and dictate the amount of sun and shade that enter. A balance of evergreen and deciduous types alters the exposure from season to season as well as the color and texture of the whole. You can deepen the impact of trees by introducing bright spring or summer blossoms and rich autumn tints, exuberant and uplifting with their stunning displays. Yet it is summer foliage that makes the greatest impression on a garden scene. Leaf shape, size, and color work together for a variety of effects—green and comforting, colorful and lively, serene and cooling, dramatic or stately—vastly different among the scores of species and cultivars of ornamental trees.

## The Landscape Role

In selecting a tree, pose a few questions to help define the role it will play in your landscape and to clarify your expectations. Will this tree be a companion to the architecture of your house, an aesthetic enhancement of your property? Are you looking for a natural element in an otherwise crowded urban area? Will it mark your property line or provide a barrier? Do you need this barrier for noise abatement, a privacy shield, or visual screening? Do you want a focal point, specimen, or accent plant?

Your purpose may be as simple and straightforward as breaking up the monotony of a barren new subdivision or introducing shade into a sunny front yard. Still, the questions continue. Are you looking for: a deciduous or an evergreen tree; heavy or light shade; shade for other plants, outdoor living, or indoor comfort? When your tree matures, it will cool the air around your house by several degrees in summer. A leafy canopy prevents heat from reflecting off pavement and keeps sunlight off walls and roofs, lowering the need for air-conditioning. Both evergreen and deciduous trees provide a cooling effect, but only deciduous trees let in winter sun for solar gain. When you are ready to get more specific, zero in on how you want your tree

to look. Do you envision a particular leaf shape or type of bark? Both foliage and bark are important for the texture they contribute to an overall design. You will want to consider resident trees and nearby shrubs so the new tree is compatible. Do you have a particular shape in mind? Most trees are rounded, but there are spires, pyramids, umbrella shapes, and columnar types. Are you interested in a flowering canopy? In what season? What about scent and color? Is autumn leaf color a factor?

If you are beginning a search for a tree with a visual image in mind, try to expand your mental picture to include the appearance in all seasons, especially the pattern of bare branches if the tree is deciduous. If you are considering a flowering tree, you may or may not be satisfied with one that has a single outstanding season, then a ho-hum expression the rest of the year. Besides ornamental fall color and spring or summer blossoms, many trees offer rich tints on emerging spring foliage. Most of the trees included in this book are good looking year-round. Some have prominent bark and twig features or ornamental fruits that become winter focal points, especially when set against contrasting backgrounds.

## The Planting Site

Before you decide on a specific tree, you must know exactly where you are going to plant it. Attempt to squarely face limitations that exist at your planting site. The site will determine the most critical elements about the tree—its size and shape, i.e., the height, spread, and habit. In the simplest terms, the site will determine whether you will plant a large or a small tree.

A small tree rarely grows out of control, combines well with shrubs, screens out unattractive views, makes an effective accent, and can be planted close to a structure and under other trees. A large tree dominates the landscape, provides shade, blocks vistas, and mitigates forceful winds. It may also demand a substantial seasonal cleanup, interfere with your neighbor's property, or overpower other plants.

For your tree to achieve its best form, it needs ample space. If it will face physical obstacles, consider substituting a narrower, lower cultivar or one with a less invasive root system. Evaluate the selected site for your tree with the following questions in mind:

- 
- Is there ample head space for vertical and lateral growth?  
Determine the consequences if major limbs end up crossing property lines.
  - Will there be enough soil in the root zone so that air and water can reach roots and so that shallow roots will not disturb other plants? When there is competition, the tree will dominate, even against a foundation.
  - Are there any overhead or underground utility lines, septic tanks, leach fields, road signs, or other possible physical restraints?
  - What type of root system does the tree have? Will it allow lawn or planting beds underneath?

A common myth about pruning perpetuates the notion that an ornamental tree can simply be hacked back whenever its branches begin to interfere with human activities. This practice is not good for either the health or the shape of most trees, since pruning cuts often invite destructive pathogens or insects and usually distort the natural beauty of a tree. Rather than choosing a tree that will grow too large for its site, opt for a named cultivar of the chosen species with a smaller growth habit, or dwarf or weeping characteristics. In some cases, you may simply have to choose a different type of tree, one shorter or narrower in habit. When you are evaluating your site, remember that it must be able to accommodate the mature canopy and root system. Planting too close to a structure or other trees inhibits sunlight and space necessary for a new tree to develop its natural shape.

## The New Habitat

One key to success is to select a species from your local flora. A species native to your climate zone and naturally adapted to conditions of the planting site will grow easily. If you introduce a tree into an environment whose conditions are only marginally acceptable and very different from those in its native habitat, it will face intolerable stress. Your tree may struggle on for years, but inevitably it will be short lived.



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Some species are less demanding than others, but all react to levels of annual rainfall and humidity, cold hardiness, and summer heat. A tree native to Zone 6, for example, may survive in warmer regions of Zone 5 until one or more severe winters cause fatal freeze damage, whereas trees native to Zone 5 are more likely to withstand abnormal cold. The same is true for other environmental factors. Plant only those species that are naturally adapted to the type of soil and pH in the new habitat. You may face a conundrum when a tree requires well-drained, nutrient-rich soil and you have clay. Though clay soils tend to be nutrient rich, most drain slowly and pose a risk to tree health unless the species is adapted to heavy soil. Note whether your selection is vigorous enough to withstand other difficult environmental factors, such as polluted air or salt spray. Some trees can survive many conditions but will appear dwarfed and unhealthy, offering little in the way of aesthetic enhancement.

Don't forget to evaluate exposure when planting your new tree. A shade-loving and ascending Japanese maple, for instance, may do quite well under the protection of existing low shade until its branches rise above surrounding shrubs and its tender foliage burns. Does that mean you will not be able to plant a Japanese maple in a chosen spot? Not at all, only that you need to select a sun-tolerant variety if the eventual height will exceed that of other shrubs or small trees in its vicinity.

## The Larger Picture

It is always a good idea to check your neighborhood to see which trees thrive there. By choosing a variety of trees, you add diversity to the area around you. Diversity strengthens the ecology of the region, fostering more wildlife while promoting healthy plants that are more disease, pest, and drought tolerant. Lack of diversity fosters insect and disease problems.

Creating diversity can also be a method of blending your new landscape into the surrounding natural scene. Look past your immediate site to what lies beyond. The visual boundaries may be merely on adjacent properties, or they may extend to hills in the distance. To create enduring beauty, set your part of the picture in harmony and scale within the whole and bequeath a celebration of trees to future generations.

# WHITE FIR

*Abies concolor*



Zones: 4–7

Type: Evergreen

Light: Full sun to part shade

Size: 30–80 ft. tall, 15–40 ft. wide

Form: Conical

Growth Rate: Slow to moderate

Interest: Flat, blue-green needles; purplish cones

Slow growing and compact when young, white fir matures into a majestic, conical tree. Pale, blue-green, 2-inch needles and strongly horizontal branches give it a silvery appearance and elegant symmetry, the shape of a perfect Christmas tree. The bark on young trees is smooth and gray while on older trees, it is paler and

becomes thick and furrowed. Tall, mature white firs produce purplish or olive-colored cones that sit like candles on upper branches, then shatter as they ripen.

## HOW TO GROW

White fir withstands cold, rugged conditions and it ranks among the best conifers for the East and Midwest. It tolerates limited drought and does best in slightly acidic, well-drained soil in climates with some humidity. Avoid



heavy clay soil or windy sites. Where rain is scarce or undependable, water moderately. Give white fir some shade where summers are hot. Select a planting site carefully to allow for white fir's eventual height. Keep a circle around the base free of vegetation and covered with mulch. Each year, enlarge the circle so it is at least 1 foot beyond the ends of the branches and replenish the mulch. In warm regions, spider mites can be a problem. Control with applications of insecticidal soap once a month from late spring to late summer.

### LANDSCAPE USE

This stately tree makes an excellent specimen in a large lawn where it can stand alone to be admired from all sides. It does not respond well to pruning or shearing, so give it plenty of room where it will not interfere with views or other landscaping. Contrast its formal, blue-green foliage with nearby stands of darker evergreens such as the black-green Nordman fir or a group of graceful, giant arborvitae. Keep it out of heavy shade, however, where it grows extremely slowly and loses its compact form.

## Top Choices

- *A. 'Candicans'* is strikingly silver-white, one of the palest-colored conifers.
- *A. koreana*, Korean fir, is a good choice for difficult urban sites because it tolerates pollution and compacted soil better than most firs. Its growth and smaller size (to 30 feet) make it suitable for smaller gardens.



### PLANT AND WATER WELL

- 1 In spring or fall, dig a hole as deep as the rootball and twice as wide. Lift the rootball—do not lift the tree by its trunk—and set it on the bottom of the hole.
- 2 Untie the burlap, but if it is made of natural jute you can leave it to hold the soil around the roots. Remove any plastic and wire cord or wrapping.
- 3 Make several cuts through the burlap, from bottom to top, thus allowing the roots to expand more quickly.
- 4 Fill the hole with the soil you dug out. Thinly cover feeder roots on the top of the rootball, but avoid the bottom of the trunk where it begins to flare out.
- 5 Water well; cover the soil with a 2- to 4-inch-thick layer of compost or finely chipped bark in a 3- to 5-foot-wide circle.

# SMALL MAPLES

*Acer*



Zones: 5–9

Type: Deciduous

Light: Full sun to part shade

Size: 8–30 ft. tall, 8–30 ft. wide

Form: Varies by species

Growth Rate: Slow to moderate

Interest: Lobed leaves that vary in size, shape, and color; decorative fruits, bark, and fall foliage

Small maples are treasures in the landscape, indispensable where garden space is limited. Their attractive foliage and fall fruits (wing-shaped samaras) bring several seasons of beauty. Many small maples combine exquisite leaf shape, color, and texture with beautiful bark and graceful form, adding

beauty to any place they're planted. Small maples stand out everywhere, especially near water, where reflections double their effect.

## HOW TO GROW

Small maples favor moist, well-drained soil, rich in organic matter, though some such as trident maple require acidic soil. Light afternoon shade is recommended in areas with hot summers to reduce leaf damage from sunlight. Plant in slightly acidic soil,



away from windy sites or places. Seasonal chores include pruning to shape in winter while the tree is dormant and fertilizing lightly in spring.

### LANDSCAPE USE

Small maples make popular additions to Japanese and rock gardens. Their size makes them a perfect fit for pocket-sized gardens, containers, courtyards, and patios. Most also make ideal specimen trees to accent lawns or buildings. Try combining them with dwarf and columnar conifers for a striking contrast.

## Top Choices

- *A. palmatum*, Japanese maple, is a nicely shaped tree with deeply lobed, attractively colored foliage. Cultivars vary enormously in habit, from broad-spreading domes to dwarf hummocks. ‘Bloodgood’, ‘Butterfly’, and ‘Deshojo’ are three outstanding cultivars. Zones 5 to 9.
- *A. japonicum*, full-moon maple, is similar to Japanese maple but slightly hardier with broad, many-lobed soft green leaves that turn bright scarlet and yellow in fall. ‘Aconitifolium’ (fernleaf maple) has magnificent fall color. Zones 5 to 7.
- *A. palmatum* ‘Dissectum’, laceleaf Japanese maple, has delicate, deeply cut leaves in green, red, or purple. ‘Green Lace’, ‘Crimson Queen’, and ‘Garnet’ have green, red, and reddish purple foliage, respectively.

## OTHER SMALL MAPLES

*A. buergeranum*, trident maple, bears shiny, three-lobed green leaves, spectacular yellowish orange to rosy maroon in fall. It is a slow-growing, highly prized small shade tree that withstands some drought. An excellent street or lawn tree, it is attractive even in winter, when the peeling orange-brown bark is most visible. Zones 5 to 9.

*A. griseum*, paperbark maple, is a favorite among fanciers of specialty plants and looks very unlike a maple. Its outstanding feature is thin, cinnamon-colored, curling and peeling bark. Three-part green leaves, which need protection from intense summer sun, have a silvery underside in spring and summer; in fall they turn orange and scarlet. Few trees create such a sensation. Zones 4 to 8.

*A. tataricum* subsp. *ginnala*, amur maple, is good for a screening hedge, patio tree, or container plant. It is one of the hardiest and most durable of the genus, tolerating wind and drought and heavy and alkaline soil. It performs best in ordinary, moist garden conditions. Its fragrant spring flowers are upstaged by the rosy red summer fruits and richly colored, three-lobed leaves in autumn. It grows best in full sun. Zones 3 to 9.