

botanic gardens

Small but beautiful trees for the garden



Acer Sango-Kaku.



Luma apiculata.



Sophora Gnome.



Wisteria sinensis.



Hamamelis 'Pallida'.



Tamarix.

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When we think of amenity trees, we often think of the traditional large park-land trees that we see in abundance throughout the countryside. Sometimes, these can be daunting because they appear so big and, when even partially grown, would never fit into our modern gardens. There are, however, many and varied alternatives available, which can give us interest, atmosphere and a scale perfectly appropriate for small to medium-sized gardens.

There are many that will provide wonderful flower colour, including Prunus 'Kursar' with its rich pink flowers, which only attains a height of 4m. Although traditionally used as a wall plant, Wisteria is equally as stunning as a specimen tree in a south-facing aspect. In May, the whole tree is covered in the most beautiful lilac flowers, heralding the

beginning of summer.

The yellow-flowered Sophora 'Gnome' is often forgotten as a candidate for a small garden and yet it adds a much needed injection of colour in April, when little else is happening. This particular tree is slow growing and requires little in the way of maintenance, which makes it a perfect choice for a novice gardener.

If interesting bark is required, then Acer griseum is ideal, as it requires a west-facing aspect, if only because it can be illuminated by late afternoon sun, making it a magical sight. The bark shines so beautifully that it looks like someone took a polishing cloth to it and it gives even more with a wonderful red autumn colour.

Trees for coastal location are tricky, not least because they have to withstand salt laden winds, but nature has given us the Tamarix, which is a showy, pink-flowered tree, well capable of holding its own against the elements.

When planning a new garden, trees are the backdrop that gives the garden maturity. Without them, a garden can lack height and overall structure,

relying on smaller shrubs to give it added interest.

Providing winter interest might not be your first thought when embarking on a garden makeover, but for me, it's a major requirement for any garden. Acer 'Sango-Kaku' gives not one, but three, seasons of interest. The beautiful fresh lime green leaves in spring fade to a wonderful gold in autumn, before revealing coral coloured stems in winter. This is a hard working tree and deserves a space in any garden, big or small.

Scent is also a consideration, especially in winter, because there is very little competition, so a tree with a scent can really stand out. The perfect candidate is witch hazel (Hamamelis 'Pallida'), with its funny-looking yellow flowers that appear almost spider-like along the stems, but with the perfume this tree offers in the coldest months of the year, it is indeed the star of the show in early spring.

Never be afraid to introduce trees into a garden. After all, they are the backbone to achieving maturity, interest and structure all year round.