

WHAT TREES SHOULD I GROW?

Different trees have different purposes and needs. Choose what to plant based on the space you have and what you want from your trees.

If you're going to grow your own trees, you want to choose the right ones. The trees may be for your own planting project or to pass on to others in your community. Either way, growing suitable species is important as you don't want to spend time and effort growing trees that won't find a home. If you're planning to pass on your newly grown trees, make sure you have identified somebody who is happy to take the type of trees you're growing before you start.

The Tree Council



Tree size and space

Growing trees is a long-term commitment and you need to select species that are suitable for the space where they will be planted. It's important to understand the size a tree will be when fully grown, and how quickly it will reach its maximum size. It's not unusual to see small front gardens overwhelmed by massive trees that were probably planted by people who didn't realise how big the young trees would get.

Horse chestnuts, for example, are easy to grow and when they are just a few years old, they make

Be sure you know how much space your young trees will need to grow before you start digging

beautiful small trees with characteristic hand-shaped leaves that are attractive to children and adults alike. However, within a few years, these fast-growing trees can become too big for a small garden, their dense canopies casting heavy shade that blocks out the light.



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Honeybee on blossom

Other considerations

As well as size and speed of growth, there are other things to consider when deciding what trees to grow. If space is limited and you only have room for a small tree, look for a species that will provide interest throughout the year. Try to pick a tree that has attractive flowers, good autumn leaf colour or berries, and interesting bark that can be appreciated during the winter.

In small spaces, also think about the overall tree shape. Look for a species that is columnar in shape or narrows towards the top (fastigate) with an upright or dense branching structure.

If you have a larger garden or space to grow trees, then consider the ultimate size of the trees and space them out accordingly. Look at the height and spread they are likely to achieve in 20 years

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and give them room or you may need to remove some of the trees later on.

Alternatively, if you're planting groups of trees, woodlands or shelterbelts (trees planted to block the wind) for example, you can deliberately plant at higher densities and then thin the trees out as they become crowded, leaving only the best and strongest specimens standing.

If you want to encourage wildlife, or are

planting in rural locations, select native species. Ornamental trees with fleshy fruits are good for birds. Do some research online, contact your local Wildlife Trust or local authority Tree Officer as they may be able to give you advice on species choice and any rare species particular to your area.

If you're still not sure what to grow, look at which trees grow well in your neighbourhood, particularly if you live in exposed or coastal areas where trees will need to be adapted to very specific climatic conditions.

Some trees can grow well in large pots or containers, but all thrive and reach their best potential when grown out in a suitable location.

When not to plant

The UK has a wonderful variety of unique habitats, which support special wildlife. It's important to plant trees where they will enhance a habitat, not damage it or make it unsuitable for sensitive species that may be dependent on certain conditions. For example, shading caused by trees planted on heathland could adversely affect rare heath wildlife, including plants, insects, birds and reptiles, which is already in decline.

Wetlands such as marshy grassland, bogs and fens support wildlife that can't survive elsewhere and saturated soils store a huge amount of carbon. Planting trees in wetlands dries them out, and can cause a decline in biodiversity and the release of sequestered carbon.

Decisions about planting should only be made when it's possible to assess the habitat you aim to plant into, though some important habitats are not always obvious to an untrained eye. Some grasslands that look unimpressive in winter, for example, may be vital for wildlife, bursting with wildflowers, bees and birds in spring and summer. Even bare earth is important for certain insect species, such as solitary bees, butterflies and reptiles. Assessing the habitat is especially important if you're looking to establish new woodlands, so always seek good ecological advice before embarking on large-scale plantings. 🍏



Jon Stokes

Some trees create a dense hedge and excellent wind break



Young trees protected by re-usable and recyclable guards



Tjasa Carr/Shutterstock

Snake's head fritillaries indicate wet meadows, which are not suitable for tree planting