

Ornamental Trees for Urban Gardens

When choosing ornamental trees for the urban garden we conjure visions of Dogwood, Magnolia, and some of the flowering fruit trees such as prunus and malus. These are indeed handsome, and size wise are well suited to most urban landscapes. They are also commonly found in most nurseries and garden centers, but with a little searching and imagination there are other ornamental trees that deserve representation in your garden. I have chosen the following that are worthy of attention because of their size, flowers, fragrance, and/or attractive bark. Many provide year-round interest.

Urban tree characteristics tend to include: moderate size; tolerance of pollution and slightly acid soil; disease and pest resistance; and the ability to add color to the landscape much of the year.



Stewartia pseudocamellia (Japanese Stewartia) A great choice for most gardens. This tree is fundamentally disease and insect free. Great exfoliating bark provides for year-round interest.

The large white 4-6 petal flowers with orange anthers occur continuously for several weeks in summer. The tree in the landscape grows to 20'-40'. This tree does not transplant well, so be sure that you buy no larger than a 4'-5' container grown or balled and burlaped plant.



This is a great accent plant, in full sun or partial shade, but needs sheltered conditions. Michael Dirr refers to *Stewartia pseudocamellia* as "possibly the best tree for the garden."



Styrax japonicus (Japanese Snowbell) This tree likes moist, acid, well-drained soil and lots of organic matter. It does not tolerate high heat or dry conditions. It has glossy leaves on the upper side of the stem that reveal, in May and June, white, bell shaped, slightly fragrant flowers with yellow stamens. It has an unusual and delicate appearance, due to branches that droop at the tips. Moderate (15'-20' wide by 20'-30' high) size and tolerance of partial shade make it an outstanding understory tree.



Chionanthus virginicus (White Fringe Tree) Under landscape conditions this slow grower is a large shrub or small tree (12 ft. in 10 years). Although it prefers deep moist fertile acid soil, it is extremely adaptable. This good urban tree is extremely tolerant of pollution. Hardy in zones 3-9 it grows to 25'-30' wide with an equal spread and is often wider than it is high. It is most handsome in flower with white slightly



fragrant panicles. Chionanthus fruits in late September and October with handsome pendulous clusters of dark blue berries on female trees, yielding to grey brown bark in late fall.



Halesia carolina (Carolina Silverbell) This lovely native of the northeastern United States will reach a height of 30'-40' and have a 20'-35' spread. It likes rich well-drained acid soil that is high in organic matter. The tree does well in either sun or shade, but will become chlorotic if soil pH is too high. It is hardy to zones 4-8. Pendular stalks of white, clustered bell-shaped flowers appear in April and May. The flowers emerge with or slightly before the leaves. This tree is very pest resistant and does well along stream banks and as an understory plant. A pink variety (Rosea) is also available.



Parrotia persica (Persian Parrotia) This is a member of the hamamelidaceae (witch hazel) family. Growing to 30'-40' high and 20'-30' wide, Parrotia likes well drained, pest free, slightly acid soils, and grows best in full sun to partial shade. Although all of the witch hazels have great landscape value, I have chosen Parrotia persica for its gorgeous leaf and color and exfoliating bark that exposes gray, green, white, and brown colors similar to the Pinus bungeana (Lacebark Pine). Like other Hamamelis, the crimson stamened flowers appear before the leaves in March and April. The leaves unfold, colored reddish purple, fade to green in the summer and continue to yellow, orange or scarlet in fall. Definitely a winner when it comes to foliage.

Oxydendron arboreum (Sourwood) My own personal favorite, is a native of the northeastern U.S. Like most good urban sized trees Oxydendron grows 25'-30' tall and 20' wide. Its pyramidal shape with drooping branches makes it an excellent specimen tree. Preferred conditions include moist, well-drained soil and full sun to partial shade. Bright green iridescent leaves are followed by long (up to 10") panicles of small urn shaped white flowers. Among its many positive attributes, its fall foliage, which turns yellow, orange and brilliant red in autumn, is the most outstanding.

