

# Choosing Small Trees for Small Yards

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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, squirrels and people all love the fruit. Choose a variety like "Guthrie" that won't root sucker.

-Ashi Magnolia (*Magnolia asheii*). Enormous leaves and huge white, fragrant blooms. A great choice for shady yards. Grows to 20 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 (*Prunus campanulata*). One of the few long-lived flowering cherries for the Deep South. Delicate, fuchsia pink blossoms in spring. Grows to 30 feet.

-Japanese Magnolia (*Magnolia lilioflora* 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 flowers 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: Satsuma Tangerine, Chinnotto Orange, Ambersweet Orange, Meyer Lemon grow to 20 foot. Meiwa and Nagami Kumquat are even smaller growing to 15 foot.

-Figs grow to be beautiful 10 to 15 foot trees, with an open, multi-trunked look.

-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. For smallest size yards choose one of the non astringents like Fuyu and Izu, they grow in the 15 foot range. Larger size yards can accommodate the astringent types like Great Wall and Saijo which will grow up to 25 foot..

-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.

-Pomegranates are small growers with emerald green shiny leaves and attractive red fruit. They stay small rarely growing over 15 foot.

-Pineapple Guava are often classed as a shrub, but left to their own devices will grow into a beautiful layered evergreen tree. Grow to 20 foot.

-Mayhaws are probably one of the most over looked small trees. They grow in dry soils as well as wet spots. Beautiful clouds of white spring time blooms followed with showy red fruit. Grow to 15 foot.

-Peach, Plum and nectarines some of the showiest small trees for small yards. Beautiful in all seasons, flower, fruit and fall color. They all can be kept in the 15 foot range.

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. As they say, good things often come in small packages.

