

Gardening tips for October

I have been asked by my reader to write about planting suitable trees for the garden. I'll have a go – this is a large subject so starting now, October being the beginning of the tree planting season, I may get finished by the spring, so keep reading for top tree tips or if you just want to improve the natural habitat in your garden. After reading this you may decide a lawn is the safest option. If you do opt for the lawn, try to resist the temptation to plant a tree in the middle, this will increasingly prevent sunlight reaching the lawn with inevitable consequences.

Only a small number of trees grow on to cause problems for buildings; for peace of mind and before planting, consider size and position. As a rule of thumb, know how high a mature specimen of your chosen tree can attain and plant this distance from the nearest building. Most of us live in a semi-urban area and therefore with small (in comparison to trees) gardens, so native woodland species such as oak trees should really be out of the question but go ahead if you have 30 meters between your planting position and any nearby property. Talking of oak trees, did you know they have a high-water demand and as a result account for the highest number of building subsidence cases in the UK. So, plant the right tree for the right location.

The planting distance from property is important especially when planting in clay soil; houses can have a difficult time staying upright on clay therefore the last thing they need is a large tree close by doing its best to desiccate the ground around its foundation, or worse, grown under; trees can also get blown over and lose their branches, another good reason for not planting close to the house.

So, with the doom and gloom out of the way, trees can add structure, colour, height, produce, a screen from nosy neighbours and attract wildlife to your garden so planting the right tree is an asset worth considering. But where to start?

For gardens, perhaps choose for colour, flowers, berries or edible produce, fortunately the choice amongst the smaller more suitable trees is vast and these species are the most likely to be stocked by the garden centres and tree nurseries. Look around, prices vary considerably as do the sizes of young trees. The smaller the tree, the easier to handle and quicker to get established so buying a large specimen may not always be the best option.

Generally, select a tree with a good strong single leading shoot. This is a good indicator of healthy growth and will aid growing to a good shape in the garden.

With your new tree ready to be planted ensure it is well watered, if you won't be planting for some time, ensure the roots do not dry out. Dig a planting hole just bigger than the spread of the tree's roots and have a supply of compost to back fill. Now you need to perfect your gardener's silly walk. This involved walking around the tree on your heels taking very small steps. This is something families can practice in the comfort of their home, see who looks the most ridiculous! Heeling the soil around the tree firms it into the ground, ensure the tree remains upright, the soil level at its base is the same as when you bought it and be careful not to scuff the tree bark with your heels. If you choose to stake the tree, plant this in your planting hole before the tree, this should prevent damage to the tree roots. The addition of fertilizer shouldn't be necessary on clay soil however a slow-release fertilizer, one rich in nitrates should give your new charge a helping hand. Once planted, don't forget to water.

Some suggestion for smallish garden trees

Acacia, Mimosa. Bright yellow flowers, can be frosted in very cold winters

Acers/Maples (the smaller varieties). Attractive foliage, various colours

Cypress. The yellow leaf forms

Holly. Shelter and hedging, Showy berries, some are variegated.

Laburnum. Long lasting bright yellow flowers.

Magnolia. Striking hardy trees for flowering winter to summer.

Fruit trees including Mulberry.

Sorbus. Possible one of the best choices for the small garden. The most easily recognisable being the Mountain Ash with its clusters of bright orange/red berries, however there are dozens of cultivars offering fantastic foliage, brilliant flowers and unusual coloured berries plus autumn colour.

The choice is yours, so get planting.

For membership details and to ask garden related questions please go to our website www.gardenreg.org.

Keep gardening.

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