

OHIO GARDENER

OHIO'S OWN GUIDE TO GREAT GARDENING & LANDSCAPING

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Native Trees for the Landscape

By adding native trees to your landscape you can help to protect and restore biodiversity. They are gorgeous and versatile, too.

So what is a “native” tree? It can be any tree from a state or region. The deciduous trees considered for this article are native to North America, and once established, should grow and survive in their planted areas. Most are tough trees rarely affected by urban life and environmental issues.

Some gardeners seem highly interested and motivated to plant native trees. Native trees appear to adapt better to landscape environments compared to alternative species, and they help protect and restore biodiversity. Natives are effective for use in urban, suburban and rural developed landscapes.

Below are 15 trees to consider for your landscape or property with important notes and descriptions about each. I hope you carefully study these and consider planting a few in your property. They are durable yet functional native tree choices.

Serviceberry, Juneberry, Sarvisberry, Saskatoon, Shadblow, Shadbush

(*Amelanchier* spp.)

Zones: 4 to 9

Size: 6 to 30 feet tall by 4 to 10 feet wide; cultivars are usually 12 feet tall by 10 feet wide

One of the best four-season small-medium ornamental trees that is available either multi- or single-trunked. It functions well in a naturalistic setting or as a specimen. There are many species and cultivars to choose from (I prefer *A. laevis*, but all are wonderful).

Common Pawpaw, Custard Apple

(*Asimina triloba*)

Zones: 5 to 9

Size: 15 to 20 feet tall and wide

This is a small tree that has the largest edible fruit native to North America. The pawpaw is native to shady, rich bottom lands, where it often forms dense undergrowth (thicket) in the forest. It is a native understory tree that needs regular watering during the growing season and does not tolerate heavy, wet, alkaline soils. Fall color is a translucent yellow.

River Birch

(*Betula nigra*)

Zones: 4 to 9

Size: 40 to 60 feet tall by 40 feet wide

This large, fine-textured shade tree is also considered an ornamental because of its peeling bark (I like the cultivar ‘Heritage’). Some chlorosis problems may occur in high-pH soils. Available as a multi-trunked form of three to five trunks, this fine specimen tree is perfect for areas along streams or ponds. It does prefer moist soils.

Sugar Maple, Hard Maple, Rock Maple

(*Acer saccharum*)

Zones: 3 to 8

Size: 60 to 80 feet tall by 40 feet wide

This stately large shade tree is one of the best. It may be used as a specimen or autumn accent tree and is a landscape standout. Many cultivars are available, and its brilliant, long-lasting fall foliage is often spectacular.

Black Tupelo, Black Gum, Sour Gum

(*Nyssa sylvatica*)

Zones: 4 to 9

Size: 30 to 50 feet tall by 20 to 30 feet wide

An excellent large shade tree mainly used as a specimen. This is one of the best and most consistent native trees for fall colors of red (and occasionally yellow), but should not be planted in alkaline soils as it prefers acidic soils. It has lustrous dark green summer foliage with consistent striking autumn color. There are a number of great cultivars available in the trade.

Yellow Buckeye

(*Aesculus octandra* or *A. flava*)

Zones: 4 to 8

Size: 60 to 75 feet tall by 40 feet wide

A handsome large shade tree preferable to Ohio buckeye (*A. glabra*), because it is less susceptible to leaf scorch. It features large showy yellow flowers in April with attractive dark green palmate leaves that change to a beautiful pumpkin color in fall. Considered to be the best large buckeye tree.



Cucumbertree Magnolia (*Magnolia acuminata*)

Cucumbertree Magnolia

(*Magnolia acuminata*)

Zones: 4 to 8

Size: 50 to 70 feet tall and wide

This is an excellent large shade tree that provides great character for larger properties. It is the hardiest of the native *Magnolia* species. Nursery-grown cultivars have showy yellow flowers and are becoming easier to find. These make fine specimen trees for the landscape.



Shingle Oak, Laurel Oak (*Quercus imbricaria*)

Shingle Oak, Laurel Oak

(*Quercus imbricaria*)

Zones: 4 to 7

Size: 60 feet tall and 70 feet wide

This is a large, spreading shade tree that performs well in dry sites and features lobe-less glossy dark green oblong leaves. The leaves shine like laurel. This tree is also very cold hardy and urban tolerant. It is a good tree for street and park uses, and is an oak that is relatively easy to transplant.



Common Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)

Common Sassafras

(*Sassafras albidum*)

Zones: 4 to 8

Size: 30 to 60 feet tall by 25 to 40 feet wide

This attractive medium native ornamental tree has spectacular autumn color. It makes a fine specimen or it is excellent as a thicket in a naturalized setting. Found as single or multi-trunked forms. It is practically impossible to transplant, and thus must be container grown.

American Hornbeam, Musclewood, Blue Beech

(*Carpinus caroliniana*)

Zones: 3 to 9

Size: 25 feet tall and wide

This is a small understory tree tolerant of a wide range of soil conditions. Typically found along streams and rivers, and it is good in naturalized areas as it will tolerate periodic flooding. It is also tolerant of pruning and can be used as a hedge or screen. This tree is not drought tolerant.

Kentucky Coffeetree

(*Gymnocladus dioica*)

Zones: 4 to 8

Size: 60 to 75 feet tall by 40 to 50 feet wide

This is a choice large tree with semi-filtered shade and a beautiful bold winter canopy. Older trees are majestic and handsome. It can get somewhat dirty with the pods and leaflets. Prune only in winter or early spring. This tree is dioecious, so the males do not fruit. It is tolerant to heat, drought and cold. Male (fruitless) cultivars available.

American Yellowwood

(*Cladrastis kentukea* or *C. flava*)

Zones: 4 to 8

Size: 30 to 50 feet tall and wide

This choice medium ornamental shade tree is excellent as a specimen or in groupings. Gray beech-like bark on its vase-shaped form coupled with a nice yellow fall color makes this an attractive choice. Flowers attract bees. Prune only in the summer, as it is a profuse bleeder.

Eastern Redbud

(*Cercis canadensis*)

Zones: 4 to 9

Size: 15 to 25 feet tall and wide

This is a popular, small ornamental tree with showy spring flowers. Eastern redbud is a strikingly conspicuous tree in the spring because it flowers before other tree leaves form. Best for naturalized, woodland (understory) settings. There is a plethora of superb cultivars now readily available.

American Hornbeam, Ironwood

(*Ostrya virginiana*)

Zones: 4 to 9

Size: 25 to 40 feet tall by 25 feet wide

An attractive small-to-medium understory tree that is a slow grower. It does well on dry sites and once established, grows very well. It is not tolerant of salt so avoid roadside plantings. Use in naturalized areas. This tree can be difficult to find in the nursery trade, but it is worth the search.

Common Baldcypress

(*Taxodium distichum*)

Zones: 4 to 9

Size: 50 to 70 feet tall by 20 to 30 feet wide

This large, deciduous conifer is an upright, stately pyramidal tree with russet brown fall color. Use as a focal point or specimen. It is superb in exceptionally moist areas where the infamous "knees" form if roots are submerged. Versatile, it is also dry site capable. Some chlorosis may occur in high pH soils. ♣

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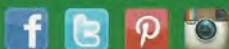


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American Yellowwood (*Cladrastis kentukea* or *C. flava*)



Common Baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*)

Scott Zanon is the award-winning author of *Landscaping with Trees in the Midwest: A Guide for Residential and Commercial Properties*. The book received the Garden Writers Association Silver Award of Achievement for Writing — Book (technical/reference).