

MWS URBAN  
FORESTRY

# TREE GUIDE

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FOR  
NASHVILLE  
AND  
DAVIDSON  
COUNTY



# RootNashville is a campaign to plant 500,000 trees in Nashville and Davidson county by 2050

Nashville's urban canopy filters our water, cleans our air, and cools our city



Please visit [RootNashville.org](http://RootNashville.org) to learn more about how you can join the movement to restore our urban canopy.



# **Recommended Small Trees**

*Average maximum  
height: 15-30 feet tall*



TheKohser - Gregory Kohs, *Syringa reticulata*  
at Winterthur Estate, CC BY-SA 3.0

## Japanese tree lilac

*Syringa reticulata*

**Mature Height:** 20-30 feet

**Mature Spread:** 15-25 feet

A very showy tree in the spring, its creamy white blooms will attract hummingbirds and butterflies. Beautiful but tough, it tolerates a range of soil and sunlight conditions, but will bloom best in full sun. It is also notable for its good health.



Dan Keck from Ohio, Allegheny Serviceberry  
(41909155292), CC0 1.0

## Common serviceberry

*Amelanchier arborea*

**Mature Height:** 15-30 feet

**Mature Spread:** 15-20

Another beautiful bloomer, it produces delicate white flowers in the spring. The fruit is also delicious, ripening in the summer, with a flavor similar to a cherry or a blueberry. Grow this tree in full sun. It can tolerate wet soil for a time, but prefers well-drained conditions.



Badgernet, *Magnolia x soulangeana* April  
2011, CC BY-SA 3.0

## Saucer magnolia

*Magnolia x soulangeana*

**Mature Height:** 25-30 feet

**Mature Spread:** 20-30 feet

Blossoms in the spring with large, fragrant, saucer-shaped flowers. Naturally a multi-stemmed tree, it takes on a rounded shape at maturity. It prefers well-drained soil, and does well with either full or partial sun.



Photo: Myrabella / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 3.0, Cerisier du Japon *Prunus serrulata*, CC BY-SA 3.0

## Kwanzan cherry

*Prunus serrulata*

**Mature Height: 15-25 feet**

**Mature Spread: 15-25 feet**

Although Kwanzan cherries have a short lifespan (15-25 years) and are susceptible to some pests, they are one of the most beautiful trees when in bloom during the spring. Plant in full to part sun and moist, well-drained soil.



Sarah Welz, flowering dogwood. 2023.

## Flowering dogwood

*Cornus florida*

**Mature Height: 20-30 feet**

**Mature Spread: 25-30 feet**

White flowers, scarlet fall foliage, and red berries make this species an ornamental classic. They require attentive care when young, but become more resilient as they mature. Plant a young individual where it will receive shade from southern and western light.



Gerd Eichmann, Baden-Baden-Magnolia stellata-06-Sternmagnolie-2006-gje, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Star magnolia

*Magnolia kobus var. stellata*

**Mature Height: 15-20 feet**

**Mature Spread: 10-15 feet**

Considered by some to be the hardiest of the magnolias, it thrives in a variety of soil conditions. Its flowers are star-shaped and brilliantly white. Naturally multi-stemmed, it can easily be pruned to take on a tree form.



Ayotte, Gilles, 1948 -, *Malus sp.* 15-  
p.bot-malus.sp-19, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Flowering crabapple

*Malus sp.*

Mature Height: 10-25 feet

Mature Spread: 10-25 feet

Flowering crabapple is known for its attractive spring flowers and small fruit, which are a favorite of many bird species. It tolerates alkaline soil and prefers full sun, attributes which confer its status as an excellent urban tree.



Plant Image Library from Boston, USA, *Cornus kousa* 'Snowboy' (Cultivar of Kousa Dogwood) (36611026736), CC BY-SA 2.0

## Kousa dogwood

*Cornus kousa*

Mature Height: 15-20 feet

Mature Spread: 15-20 feet

The kousa dogwood has starry white blooms in the spring and brilliant red foliage in the fall. Many also find its bark quite beautiful. It is well-known for its resiliency compared to other dogwood species. It would still benefit from attentive care and some shade from southern and western sunlight.



Alpsdake, *Chionanthus retusus*  
s1, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Chinese fringetree

*Chionanthus retusus*

Mature Height: 15-20 feet

Mature Spread: 10-15 feet

Highly adaptable and tough as nails, the Chinese fringetree will produce an ample bloom in full sun. It can grow in a variety of soils.



Courtesy of U.S. National Arboretum.

## Frontier elm

*Ulmus minor x parvifolia*

Mature Height: 20-25 feet

Mature Spread: 10-20 feet

Small but mighty, this elm cross has good disease resistance. It is very tolerant of challenging urban conditions, including poor soil and drought. Leaves turn a pretty reddish-purple in autumn.



By Jean-Pol GRANDMONT - CC BY 2.5,

## Persian ironwood

*Parrotia persica*

Mature Height: 20-40 feet

Mature Spread: 20-35 feet

This is a very forgiving tree species that can grow in even the most difficult conditions. It is a go-to choice for planting strips and other harsh urban settings. It can be used as a non-invasive substitute for Bradford pear.



Courtesy of Southern Native Trees.

## American hornbeam

*Carpinus caroliniana*

Mature Height: 20-30 feet

Mature Spread: 20-30 feet

This slow-growing, native species can be planted in full sun or full shade. It tolerates both wet and dry soils, and it produces small nutlets that birds and other animals enjoy.



# **Recommended Medium Trees**

*Average maximum  
height: 30-50 feet tall*



Sarah Welz, American holly. 2023.

## American holly

*Ilex opaca*

**Mature Height: 35-50 feet**

**Mature Spread: 15-25 feet**

This tree produces a glossy red fruit that attracts a variety of bird species. But be aware, they are poisonous to humans. Plant this sleek evergreen in moist soil for a long-lived, native species that will contribute to your neighborhood's ecosystem.



செல்வா, இளம் மஞ்சள் மரம் Yellowwood young tree, CC BY-SA 4.0

## American yellowwood

*Cladrastis kentukea*

**Mature Height: 30-50 feet**

**Mature Spread: 40-50 feet**

With its wisteria-like spring flowers, urban tolerance, and attractiveness to birds, this medium-sized tree is extremely popular in gardens. It likes full sun and can grow in acidic and alkaline soils.



SEWilco, River Birch Betula nigra, CC BY-SA 3.0

## River birch

*Betula nigra*

**Mature Height: 40-50 feet**

**Mature Spread: 25-35 feet**

River birch, as its name implies, do very well in moist soil conditions. But despite its affinity for water, it can also do well in drier soils. It grows quickly, and often with multiple trunks, creating a textured and attractive canopy.



Famartin, 2014-05-13 08 32 55 Eastern Red Cedar at South Riding Golf Club in South Riding, Virginia, CC BY-SA 3.0

## Eastern Redcedar

*Juniperus virginiana*

**Mature Height: 40-50 feet**

**Mature Spread: 10-20 feet**

A species renowned for its hardiness, it can live up to 300 years, and resists extremes of heat, cold, and drought. This tree produces aromatic fruit that is traditionally used to flavor gin. This same fruit also attracts birds, like the much-beloved cedar waxwing.



Nankou Oronain (as36...Prunus yedoensis 2014.4.08 - panoramio, CC BY-SA 3.0

## Yoshino cherry

*Prunus x yedoensis*

**Mature Height: 35-40 feet**

**Mature Spread: 30-40 feet**

This wildly popular cherry cultivar is renowned worldwide for its beauty. It does well in full sun and most soil conditions, are long as the site is well-drained.



Richard Webb, Bugwood.org

## American arborvitae

*Thuja occidentalis*

**Mature Height: 25-40 feet**

**Mature Spread: 10-12 feet**

Also known as Northern white-cedar, this species is well suited for serving as a screen. It can tolerate extended flooding but prefers well-drained soil. Avoid planting in full shade, as its canopy density will substantially decrease.



そらみみ, Stela and *Acer buergerianum* on site of Former Dazaifu Headquarters, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Trident maple

*Acer buergerianum*

Mature Height: 30-45 feet

Mature Spread: 25-30 feet

Hardy, and possessing beautiful fall foliage of bright orange and red, this species is a popular street tree in cities. It is also suitable as a shade tree or as an ornamental addition to a yard.



John Ruter, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org

## Sweetbay magnolia

*Magnolia virginiana*

Mature Height: 40-50 feet

Mature Spread: 15-25 feet

This magnolia species has lush, dark green leaves and large, lemon-scented white flowers. Its fruit ripens in late summer and attracts birds. This species is well-suited to moist soil conditions, oftentimes being used in rain gardens to absorb runoff in urban areas.



[hophornbeam](#) (*Ostrya virginiana* (P. Mill.) K. Koch), (P. Mill.) K. Koch

## Hophornbeam

*Ostrya virginiana*

Mature Height: 30-40 feet

Mature Spread: 25-30 feet

The hophornbeam is a small, un-fussy native. It is not particular about soil type, but it definitely prefers partial to full shade. Its good drought tolerance and lack of disease problems rounds out this easy tree.



"FallColor" by Bev Sykes is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

## Chinese pistache

*Pistachia chinensis*

Mature Height: 25-35 feet

Mature Spread: 25-35 feet

This relative of the pistachio tree does not bear nuts; instead, its value is that of a highly regarded urban tree. Renowned for its toughness and excellent fall foliage, this tree is popular with homeowners and urban forestry professionals alike.



Michael Rivera, VSU Quad Tree 38, CC BY-SA 3.0

## Overcup oak

*Quercus lyrata*

Mature Height: 30-40 feet

Mature Spread: 30-40 feet

Named for its acorn cap that almost entirely covers the fruit, the overcup oak is a versatile medium-sized tree. It transplants easily, adapts to unfavorable soil conditions, and has a naturally upswept crown that requires very little pruning.



John Hagstrom, used with permission, Morton Arboretum

## Chinkapin oak

*Quercus muehlenbergii*

Mature Height: 40-60 feet

Mature Spread: 50-60 feet

Chinkapin oak is set apart by its ability to thrive in alkaline soil, an advantage in Nashville's limestone-rich environment. It is a host to numerous butterflies and moths. Plant it in full sun for best results.



# Recommended Large Trees

*Average maximum  
height: 50-100+ feet  
tall*



Ptelea, Liriodendron, Exbury, CC BY-SA 3.0

## Tulip poplar

*Liriodendron tulipifera*

**Mature Height: 80-100 feet**

**Mature Spread: 30-50 feet**

The tallest hardwood tree in North America with an average lifespan of 200-250 years. Tulip poplar have a self-contained, oval form, strong wood, and broad soil tolerance. It grows very well in urban conditions and does not require extensive pruning, but strongly prefers full sun.



AnRo0002, 20151017Quercus nuttallii, CC0 1.0

## Nuttall oak

*Quercus nuttallii*

**Mature Height: 60-80 feet**

**Mature Spread: 35-50 feet**

An excellent example of a native oak that is well adapted to our climate. It has few issues and does well in the urban environment. It prefers moderately moist soil conditions with full sun.



Jean-Pol GRANDMONT, *Gymnocladus dioicus* JPG1a, CC BY-SA 3.0

## Kentucky Coffeetree

*Gymnocladus dioicus*

**Mature Height: 65-70 feet**

**Mature Spread: 45-60 feet**

This tree is considered well-suited for urban environments. It tolerates poor soil, has excellent drought tolerance, and has few diseases or pests of concern. The 'Espresso' cultivar is a seedless variety and does not produce the large pods of uncultivated specimens.



Photo by David J. Stang, Zelkova serrata 11zz, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Japanese zelkova

*Zelkova serrata*

**Mature Height: 55-80 feet**

**Mature Spread: 50-75 feet**

This fast-growing species is extremely tolerant of urban conditions and can be found in many areas around Nashville as a street tree. It strongly prefers full sun, but can grow in a wide range of soil pH and moisture conditions.



Martinroell, 050628-zuidentifizierenderbaum-pillnitz, marked as public domain.

## Baldcypress

*Taxodium distichum*

**Mature Height: 60-80 feet**

**Mature Spread: 25-35 feet**

Although this species is native to swampy lowlands, it does quite well as a statement tree in a variety of conditions. Growing tall and straight, this conifer is unique in that it drops its needles each year. The needle drop is preceded by a striking fall foliage display of bright orange.



Msact at English Wikipedia, Keeler Oak Tree - distance photo, May 2013, CC BY-SA 3.0

## White oak

*Quercus alba*

**Mature Height: 60-100 feet**

**Mature Spread: 60-80 feet**

Enormous in size and longevity, this species can live for 500 years or more in its preferred conditions - deep, moist, and well-drained soil, with partial to full sun exposure.



James St. John, *Quercus bicolor* (swamp white oak) 1, CC BY 2.0

## Swamp white oak

*Quercus bicolor*

**Mature Height: 50-70 feet**

**Mature Spread: 50-70 feet**

Although related to *Quercus alba*, *Quercus bicolor* has some important differences. It is more tolerant of moist soil (as its name implies), grows more quickly, and does not get quite as large. But it too prefers partial to full sun.



James St. John, *Acer rubrum* (red maple tree in fall colors) (Newark campus of Ohio State University, Newark, Ohio, USA) (20 October 2015) 3 (21724086524), CC BY 2.0

## Red maple

*Acer rubrum*

**Mature Height: 60-75 feet**

**Mature Spread: 25-35 feet**

Known and loved for its unparalleled autumn foliage, this tree bursts into spectacular color between mid-October and early November. It likes full sun, grows fairly quickly, and tolerates extended flooding.



Freekhous, Tree in Mississippi, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Willow oak

*Quercus phellos*

**Mature Height: 60-75 feet**

**Mature Spread: 40-50 feet**

Named for its unique spear-shaped leaves that are reminiscent of true willow. It transplants well, thrives in full sun, and tolerates poorly drained soil.



*Tilia americana*, marked as public domain.

## Basswood

*Tilia americana*

**Mature Height: 50-80 feet**

**Mature Spread: 35-50 feet**

Often used as a shade tree, its dark, heart-shaped leaves cast an inviting and deep shadow in the summer. In spring, its flowers produce a nectar that attracts native pollinators. It can grow in acidic and alkaline soil, and likes partial to full sun.



Gerd Eichmann, Baden-Baden-Nyssa sylvatica-22-Tupelobaum-2013-gje, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Black tupelo

*Nyssa sylvatica*

**Mature Height: 65-75 feet**

**Mature Spread: 25-35 feet**

Shown here with its brilliant fall foliage, black tupelo is one of our most attractive native trees. It produces dark blue fruit that is enjoyed by many birds. Best in acidic, well-drained soils, but can tolerate extended flooding.



EecherplazGinkgo06.jpg; Cayambe derivative work: Ginkgotree (talk), GINKGOBAUM-2, CC BY-SA 3.0

## Maidenhair tree

*Ginkgo biloba*

**Mature Height: 50-75 feet**

**Mature Spread: 50-60 feet**

Often referred to simply as ginkgo, this species has a beautiful, bright yellow autumn color. It is extremely resistant to disease and tolerates even the toughest urban conditions. But be aware, the females of this species produce smelly fruit, so procure a male specimen whenever possible.



Bruce Marlin, *Acer saccharum*, CC BY-SA 2.5

## Sugar maple

*Acer saccharum*

**Mature Height: 50-80 feet**

**Mature Spread: 35-50 feet**

The sugar maple is an excellent addition to any landscape or yard. It is sensitive to reflected heat and light, so avoid planting it near roads or other reflective surfaces. This is a rare canopy species that can grow in full shade, and it tolerates a broad range of soil conditions.



Famartin, 2020-06-23 17 18 11 Southern Magnolia blooming along Plum Dale Drive in the Franklin Glen section of Chantilly, Fairfax County, Virginia, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Southern magnolia

*Magnolia grandiflora*

**Mature Height: 60-80 feet**

**Mature Spread: 30-40 feet**

The largest species of magnolia in this booklet, it has large, cream-white flowers in spring and vibrantly red fruit in the fall. It prefers partial to full sun, and can grow in acidic or alkaline conditions. It does best in well-drained soil.



Courtesy of the Nashville Tree Conservation Corps.

## Shumard oak

*Quercus shumardii*

**Mature Height: 55-80 feet**

**Mature Spread: 40-50 feet**

Fast growing with few diseases and a high drought tolerance, the Shumard oak is an excellent and versatile species. Plant it anywhere that it will have full sun and room to spread, as long as the soil is well-drained.



John Ruter, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org

## Sweetgum

*Liquidambar styraciflua*

**Mature Height: 60-75 feet**

**Mature Spread: 35-50 feet**

The most popular cultivars of the sweetgum are the fruitless varieties, due to the spiky balls this species produces otherwise. The 'Rotundiloba' cultivar is fruitless, as is 'Happidaze'. This Tennessee native is host to 30 different butterfly and moth species and has beautiful fall color. Keep it well-watered when young.



Jeffrey Reed „Quercus falcata in Marengo Alabama USA“

## Southern red oak

*Quercus falcata*

**Mature Height: 60-80 feet**

**Mature Spread: 60-70 feet**

Southern red oak is durable and produces acorns that are popular with wildlife. It naturally develops a strong form that requires little maintenance, but make sure it is planted where it will get full sun. It is drought-tolerant.



Sarah Welz, black cherry. 2024.

## Black cherry

*Prunus serotina*

**Mature Height: 60-90 feet**

**Mature Spread: 35-50 feet**

This native canopy tree is a keystone species, with a disproportionately beneficial effect on the ecosystem. It likes full to partial shade, and has a good tolerance for drought. It produces small sweet cherries that can be eaten by humans (except for the pits!)



Vern Wilkins, Indiana University, Bugwood.org

## Pecan

*Carya illinoensis*

**Mature Height: 70-100 feet**

**Mature Spread: 50-70 feet**

The prized pecan will begin to produce nuts in as little as four to eight years when planted from a container. Put it in a spot where it will receive lots of sun and have plenty of room to grow!



Growth Habit, Jim Robbins CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

## Arborvitae 'Green Giant'

*Thuja plicata x standishii*

**Mature Height: 40-60 feet**

**Mature Spread: 12-18 feet**

With dense foliage, a pyramidal shape, and an ability to grow up to three feet per year, this hybrid evergreen is a standout screen tree. It isn't picky about soil conditions but it will do best with at least partial sun.



Jason Sharman, Vitalitree, Bugwood.org

## Bur oak

*Quercus macrocarpa*

**Mature Height: 70-90 feet**

**Mature Spread: 60-80 feet**

This massive oak species is most appropriate for large yards. It is long-lived, sturdy, and adaptable. If you don't mind its big acorns and have the necessary space, this species is an excellent selection for a spot that receives full sun.