

# TIME FOR

# TREES

Planting a tree can bring many benefits to your garden, but picking the right species is the key to success, as garden designer Hugo Bugg tells Jane Perrone

**T**he best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.' This Chinese proverb has never been more apt: after a summer of extreme heat, introducing more shade to our gardens surely tops our horticultural to-do lists.

But trees offer so much more, argues garden designer Hugo Bugg: they add beauty to any garden, store carbon to mitigate climate change and boost our mental health and offer refuge for wildlife.

'Trees offer cooler temperatures underneath hot weather, and they also absorb water and slow down soil erosion. So they can help with hotter, drier summers and flash flooding in winter,' Hugo explains. 'Trees also host huge complex microhabitats: they are home to hundreds of species including birds, bats and insects.'

With a dizzying selection of species to choose from, in sizes ranging from a tiny sapling to a mature specimen 5m or more tall, it can be hard to know where to start. This is where Hugo's Exeter-based design practice Harris Bugg Studio, which he runs with fellow designer Charlotte Harris, comes in. 'We can help select the right tree at the right size,' says Hugo. 'Once it is planted, we love to remain engaged with our clients to see how the trees are growing, and support them with maintenance strategies and further planting.'

That choice should apply the same principles as for any garden purchase: 'right plant, right place'. Hugo recommends starting with size and form: that means both eventual height and spread, but also how fast the tree will reach maturity.

'A tree we plant could be there for 200 years. Is it the right tree for now, and in the future?'

Then there is the site itself. Is your chosen spot in sun or shade, or in a frost pocket? Is the soil sandy or heavy clay? These factors will shape the shortlist of possible species, and then it's a question of choosing the character of the tree.

The key word is seasonality: what does the tree offer for spring, summer, autumn and winter, from flowers and fruit to foliage colour and interesting bark? Hugo prioritises tree species that offer the greatest boost for biodiversity, including providing food for pollinators and birds and homes for invertebrates.

Hugo also advises looking at how trees relate to the landscape beyond the garden. 'Choosing species, forms and shapes that relate to what you see out the window, making your view bigger and more connected,' he explains. That does not necessarily mean sticking to native species. As climate change increasingly brings weather extremes as well as new pests and diseases to our gardens, choosing non-natives that are better able to cope with tougher conditions makes sense; for instance Turkish hazels rather than English ones, and holm and cork oaks as well as common oaks.

The size of the budget may determine the initial size of your chosen tree, but Hugo points out that sometimes younger, smaller trees are a more canny choice. 'Sometimes a younger tree will establish and grow quicker, eventually overtaking more mature specimens, but if you have a view that you need to screen instantly, a larger tree is more successful,' he explains. The type of tree you buy can also make a difference to the budget, and its care regime: trees bought as bare-roots or rootballed specimens tend to be a little cheaper, and must be planted between November and March, whereas potted trees can be planted year-round. Hugo advises that the next few months are the ideal time to plant any tree, giving them a chance to develop roots while the soil is moist.

Harris Bugg Studio offsets its carbon footprint for travel by planting trees in collaboration with local community groups and schools near its offices in Exeter. For more information contact the studio on 01392 927172. [harrisbugg.com](http://harrisbugg.com)



# HOW TO PLANT A POTTED TREE



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**1** Get the right tools to hand before starting your tree planting project.

**2** Soak the rootball until it is thoroughly wet.

**3** Remove a 2m diameter circle of turf with your tree's final location as the centre. Level out the ground.

**4** Dig a square hole to the same depth as the pot. Dig over the base and sides to make sure the soil is friable.

**5** Take the tree out of the pot and check the roots, teasing out any that are tightly bound.

**6** Place the tree in the hole. Place a rake across the hole to make sure that the tree is at the right level, so none of the trunk is buried, but you cannot see any of the roots above ground. Trees are often planted too deep – you should just be able to see the root flare at the base of the trunk.

**7** Backfill with the soil you took out, gently firming the soil as you go; do not add any manure or other soil amendments to the hole, as this will discourage roots from spreading further. Use your heel to firm the soil's surface.

**8** Add a stake with a rubber tree tie to anchor the root ball as it establishes. Position the stake on the same side as prevailing winds, so the trunk can sway without being damaged.

**9** Add a 8cm/3inch layer of bark mulch around the tree to suppress weeds and retain soil moisture, leaving a gap around the base of the trunk.

**10** Give the tree a good soak whenever the soil is dry; if you are not able to regularly water, use a tree hydration bag.



# HUGO'S FAVOURITE TREES FOR GARDENS



## CRAB APPLE 'RED SENTINEL'

**(*Malus x robusta* 'Red Sentinel')**: Great for wildlife and has the reddest of fruits out all the crab apples which hold well into winter.



## TUPELO

**(*Nyssa sylvatica*)**: Large North American tree with stunning autumn colour and beautifully characterful branches.

## FIELD MAPLE

**(*Acer campestre*)**: A tough native tree that links into the wider landscape but equally looks lovely in a small or medium garden.

## GREY ALDER 'LACINIATA'

**(*Alnus incana* 'Laciniata')**: A fast grower that is tough enough for floods and droughts. Provides dappled shade.

**LEFT:** Tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*) and autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) in Harris Bugg Studio's gold medal-winning M&G Garden at Chelsea Flower Show 2021



## AUTUMN OLIVE

**(*Elaeagnus umbellata*)**: A very drought resistant small tree with a strong perfume and edible red berries in late summer.

## JAPANESE PAGODA TREE

**(*Styphnolobium japonicum*)**: Filigreed leaves and creamy, fragrant pea-like flowers in summer and seedpods held throughout winter.



## BROAD-LEAVED COCKSPUR THORN

**(*Crataegus persimilis* 'Prunifolia')**: Small to medium tree with brighter fruit and stronger autumnal colour than the standard hawthorn.