

GARDEN STYLE WITH TREES AND SHRUBS

Despite the great popularity of herbaceous plants in recent years, **Arabella Lennox-Boyd** reminds us just how important trees, shrubs and hedges are in today's gardens

ALL TOO OFTEN trees and shrubs are forgotten in the excitement of contemporary herbaceous planting, but to me they are key to good garden design – as well as giving limitless pleasure throughout the year. There is such a huge range of possibilities that there will be just the right one for your garden, whether it is a small shrub by the back door or an elegant centrepiece for a lawn or border.

Trees and shrubs create the framework within which a cultivated space is organised, and are among the most important design tools. When choosing a tree or shrub, you should consider the following:

- **scale:** make sure that the mature tree will eventually suit your space. Research its spread and height, and its rate of growth if the tree will be large;
- **soil:** check the soil is suitable, considering pH, type (clay, loam or sand), depth and moisture availability;
- **foliage and flower:** be brave and imagine different leaf colours in your space – greys, pale green, deep reds in autumn, or maybe an evergreen. Spring foliage colour may be more vibrant than in summer, while fruits may adorn branches in autumn;
- **root sizes:** remember that the roots of some trees can be invasive (such as willows or poplars) and should not be planted too close to buildings. In addition, during establishment trees need at least 1m (39in) clear space around them, free from other plant competition.

There is a huge range to choose from and therefore a much wider selection should be planted, even in small gardens – so, provided you think about the points above, have fun and experiment. ▶

FRAMED PICTURE
Acer palmatum var. *dissectum* 'Seiryū' frames Arabella Lennox-Boyd's kitchen-garden gate, leading the eye towards it. Its soft structural branches arch in sympathy with the gate while in the understorey hydrangeas and skimmias add contrast





A BAILLACHE



ARABELLA LENNOX-BOYD



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◁FORM AND FUNCTION

A goblet-trained pear tree proves both productive and decorative in a kitchen garden – it can take between five and 10 years to achieve this, but with regular staking and pruning, the visual value it can give to a garden space is substantial

FRAMED PICTURE ▽

Spring at Arabella Lennox-Boyd's garden, Gresgarth Hall, Lancashire, is ushered in by flowering trees including *Prunus* 'Shirotae' and *Amelanchier lamarkii* – their autumn colour is also of great benefit



ANDREW LAWSON

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△FOLIAR EFFECT

In this garden, a combination of *Skimmia*, *Taxus* and *Pyrus salicifolia* var. *orientalis* 'Pendula' with existing *Taxus baccata* Fastigiata Aurea Group enliven a boundary and create interesting garden spaces

△DEFINING SPACE

Even the smallest gardens have potential to be improved and made interesting with shrubs. This cloud-pruned box (*Buxus*) hedge by the house, and further use of box in the container as topiary, provides evergreen structure all year round

Be clear about the type of space you want to create and only use trees and shrubs that fit the design intention. Even in small spaces, trees can frame a gateway or boundary, become a focal point or lead the eye. On larger sites, they can form avenues or line a drive. On occasion I 'borrow' trees from a neighbouring garden as part of a composition, be it a small urban garden or rural estate. Sometimes I use them to create a mood – scale, colour, foliage, berry and bark must be considered. Check the eventual size of plants before using them in smaller gardens. We all know stories of *X Cuprocyparis leylandii* overwhelming neighbours and blocking their light. The same can happen with species such as *Cedrus* or *Aesculus*, so choose large trees with care.

Hedges and topiary

I often use hedges to create spaces – yew, box and hornbeam, native hedges (such as hawthorn, hazel and field maple) and rose hedges (I plant roses such as *Rosa rugosa* and its cultivars). If I need to plant a long hedge I try to make it more interesting by varying height, adding piers or cubes, by foliage contrast, and by the layering of heights and

textures. Topiary, pleached trees and trained trees also form part of the designer's vocabulary. Often, I enclose the base of a pot in box or yew; place hebes at the bottom of fruit trees planted in a grid for repetition of form; edge paths with stepover apples or pears; or use goblet-trained fruit trees to frame kitchen garden spaces.

Mostly, I use trees and shrubs for the sheer pleasure they bring. I often include: acers for their manageable size, delicate foliage, interesting bark and elegant form; *Malus* for spring flowers and autumn fruit; *Sorbus* for foliage and autumn colour/berry; *Cornus* for flower and form; *Magnolia* for their shape and flower, and the fact that they come in different sizes (from small *M. stellata* 'Royal Star' to statuesque *M. x campbellii* (Raffillii Group) 'Kew's Surprise').

I use *Prunus* for flower and autumn colour and rarer trees such as *Styrax*, *Halesia* and *Stewartia* (among many others) in sites with acid soils and woodland conditions for their foliage, flower and form. Visits to Japan have encouraged me to prune small trees heavily, creating an open, architectural framework under which other plants will grow happily. ▶

Trees and shrubs with coloured foliage are useful design tools. Grey-leaved *Pyrus salicifolia* var. *orientalis* 'Pendula', *Pittosporum*, *Eleagnus angustifolia* and *E. umbellata* highlight dark areas. Purple-leaved *Prunus cerasifera* 'Pissardii' provides contrast or can be clipped as balls, as I have done in my garden at Gresgarth Hall, Lancashire, where I was inspired by the gardens at Drummond Castle, Scotland.

I believe herbaceous planting should be anchored by trees, shrubs and hedges. Within this framework, I use shrubs as part of the planting mix, such as *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple' (whose maroon foliage sets off so many herbaceous plants), *Hydrangea aspera* Villosa Group or *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Silver Queen'.

When obtaining a tree or shrub do your research first and buy from a reputable nursery. I do not favour large specimens as they are slower to establish in the long run, and need careful treatment until settled. Unusual selections are seldom available in large sizes and it is surprising how fast most trees and shrubs grow in the correct conditions. Sometimes I design a garden with existing mature specimens and effective regular pruning will keep these plants in scale. In small gardens especially, each plant must remain in its allocated space to maintain the integrity and subtlety of the design.

Regardless of the scale of your plot, my hope is that we will all plant more wonderful trees and shrubs whenever possible for a beautiful and often low-maintenance solution for tomorrow's gardens. ■

Arabella Lennox-Boyd, international landscape designer, was recently awarded the RHS Veitch Memorial Medal for her contribution to horticulture



ARBABELLA LENNOX-BOYD



JOHN GLOVER



CLIVE INCHIOS

▷SEASONAL CHANGE

A fine pair of *Magnolia x soulangeana* frame the central axis of this Hampstead garden in spring, while the surrounding hedges and topiary create a framework throughout the year (top). Shrubs or trees with autumn colour such as *Cotinus* can lengthen the season (middle), while in winter good structure is all important (bottom)



ANDREW LAWSON

◁MAKING THE MOST OF SPACE

In small town gardens, every inch of space must be used. In Arabella's London garden layered trees and shrubs maximise impact. Clipped evergreen structure and frame the seat. Wisteria cascades from a soft green wall of ivy behind, while elsewhere *Cornus alternifolia* 'Argentea' and *Ceanothus* 'Concha' provide form, foliage contrast and flower colour

i Further information:
 • For more advice on tree selection, enter 'Trees for smaller gardens' in the search on the RHS Online homepage: www.rhs.org.uk
 • See Gardens to Visit (pp780-783) for tree-related events in RHS Recommended Gardens.
 • Further reading: *RHS Simple Steps: Shrubs and Small Trees* by Simon Akeroyd, RHS/DK, 2008, ISBN 9781405327909. RRP £6.99

CHOOSING SOME OF THE BEST

These are a few of Arabella Lennox-Boyd's favourite trees and shrubs for small or medium-sized sites (sizes are approximate at maturity).

- ***Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum* 'Seiryū'** has good shape and delicate foliage with fine autumn tints. Height: 6m (20ft) Spread: 3m (10ft)
- ***Cornus* 'Norman Hadden'** is a substantial, spreading tree with attractive creamy

- flowerheads through summer. H and S: 8m (26ft)
- ***Magnolia x loebneri*** is reliable with delightful, white, star-shaped spring flowers. H: 10m (33ft) S: 7m (23ft)
- ***Prunus* 'Shōgetsu'** has bronze spring foliage and

- masses of double pink and white flowers. H: 5m (15ft) S: 8m (25ft)
- ***Styrax formosanus* var. *formosanus*** is a summer-flowering tree with scented white flowers. H: 10m (30ft) S: 7m (23ft)

- ***Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple'** with maroon foliage is an easily grown large shrub. H: 5m (16ft) S: 8m (26ft)
- ***Deutzia setchuenensis* var. *corymbiflora*** has clouds of delicate, cup-shaped, white flowers in early summer.

- H: 2m (6½ft) S: 1.5m (5ft)
- ***Daphne bholua* 'Jacqueline Postill'** produces scented flowers in winter and spring; a popular addition to many gardens. H: 3m (10ft) S: 1.5m (5ft)
- ***Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Jelena'** (inset, left) has scented

- coppery-orange flowers in winter. H and S: 3m (10ft)
- ***Hebe topiaria*** is an excellent, low-maintenance alternative to box balls. Its small, grey, evergreen foliage provides a neat rounded shape. H: 60cm (24in) S: 80cm (32in)



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