MWS URBAN FORESTRY

TREE GUIDE

FOR NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY

METRO WATER SERVICES

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

root nashville

PLANT A TREE GROW OUR CITY

Please visit RootNashville.org to learn more about how you can join the movement to restore our urban canopy.

Recommended Small Trees

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 × soulangeana April 2011, CC BY-SA 3.0

Saucer magnolia

Magnolia x soulangiana

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.

Recommended Medium Trees

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. Take care not it to plant too close to doorways - it is quite messy and one may find themselves tracking its leaves indoors. 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.

Yekaterina Borisova, White Cedar, туя, CC BY-SA 4.0

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.

Sarah Welz, sweetbay magnolia. 2023.

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 raingardens to absorb runoff in urban areas.

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

Trident maple

Acer buergeranum

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.

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.

Recommended Large Trees

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.

Marty Aligata, Elm Tree in Brattle Brook Park, Pittsfield, MA - August 2020, CC BY-SA 4.0

Princeton elm

Ulmus americana 'Princeton'

Mature Height: 70-90 feet

Mature Spread: 50-70 feet

This disease-resistant cultivar possesses the classic elm appearance, with a vase-shaped crown that casts abundant shade in the summer. Much-beloved for its grace and elegance, it has good drought tolerance and 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.

Martinroell, 050628-zuidentifizierenderbaum-pillnitz, marked as public domain, more details on Wikimedia Commons

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.

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.

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.

Freekhou5, 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, more details on Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Template:PD-US

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.

Bruce Kirchoff from Greensboro, NC, USA, Quercus shumardii (23580170173), CC BY 2.0

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.

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.