

Deciduous shade trees for Canberra gardens

Shade trees are an important feature in Canberra gardens. The shade they provide in our hot summers can be relieving and rewarding. The leaves fall in autumn allowing the low winter sun to warm up cold spots in the garden and the house.

Positioning of trees needs to be carefully considered. A large tree can dominate a garden, and can often restrict the growth of colourful shrubs that require full sun.

If you have a small yard, choose a small tree to place on the north or the west side of the house. This will provide the shade you need without taking up a large amount of space.

Large trees have large root systems. In Canberra's shallow clay soils, the vast majority of roots will be close to the surface where they are more likely to interfere with drainage pipes, paths, paving foundations, etc. For these reasons, plant trees at least 5 metres away from the house, drains, paths or any other fixed surfaces.

Deciduous trees in this hot, dry climate will require watering in summer.

Deep watering (eg. For 1-2 hours, once a week) will encourage a strong, healthy root system that is less likely to damage paving. Reduce watering in autumn by half, and cease watering altogether if it rains throughout winter.

The following list of trees has proven to be successful in Canberra.

Small Trees – up to 8 metres tall

- ***Acer buergerianum* – Trident Maple** – compact tree to 6m. Lime green foliage, followed by rich red autumn colours. More 'sun hardy' than most other Maples. Upright growing while young, then slightly weeping once established.
- ***Acer palmatum* – Japanese Maple** – delicate tree to 5m with soft, ferny leaves. Red/orange/yellow foliage in autumn. Will not tolerate hot sun or wind from the west in the summer. Very shade tolerant.
- ***Albizia julibrissin* – Silk Tree** – fast-growing but short-lived tree to 6m × 5m. Graceful, ferny foliage and pink flowers in summer.
- ***Malus ioensis* 'Plena' – Betchels Crab Apple** - a lovely small tree to 4m × 3m with yellow/orange autumn foliage. Large double pale pink blossoms spring.
- ***Malus ioensis* 'Rubra'** – small tree to 5m with coppery red new growth. Orange/copper autumn foliage and deep red blossoms in spring.

- ***Prunus* species – Ornamental Cherries, Plums, Apricots and Peaches.** Tough trees 4 - 6m. Very tolerant of dry, heavy or wet soils. Many flower and foliage colours. Some varieties can produce ornamental fruit.
- ***Pyrus ussuriensis* – Manchurian Pear** – a stunning tree to 8m with deep green, glossy leaves. Bright red autumn foliage and white blossoms in spring. Very hardy and reliable.
- ***Pyrus calleryana* ‘Bradford’** – A hardy, beautiful tree to 8m x 4m with a bushy, dense crown. Glossy green foliage turns orange, yellow, red and crimson in autumn. White blossoms are a feature in spring. A very reliable and lovely tree for Canberra gardens.
- ***Pyrus calleryana* ‘Red Spire’** – Similar to *Pyrus calleryana* ‘Bradford’, but with a very narrow canopy. Grows to 8m x 2.5m. Great for narrow spots or in rows for shaping.
- ***Syringa vulgaris* - Lilac** - A lovely small deciduous tree to 3m. Fragrant flowers in spring/summer. Prune off lower branches for a ‘tree’ shape.

Medium Trees – up to 15 metres tall

- ***Betula pendula* (syn. *Betula alba*) – Silver Birch** – an upright tree to 12m, with leaves turning yellow in autumn. Needs plenty of extra water in dry weather. Decorative white trunk. Good for planting in groups of 3-5, creating a forest effect.
- ***Fraxinus rotundifolia* ‘Raywood’ – Claret Ash** – A fast-growing, hardy tree to 15m. Deep green foliage, turning burgundy in autumn. A dense, bushy tree for large gardens.
- ***Gleditsia tricanthos* ‘Shademaster’ – Honey Locust** - very showy tree to 12m. Wonderful arching branches, which produce a lovely shade canopy. A thornless variety.
- ***Gleditsia tricanthos* ‘Sunburst’ – Honey Locust** - Similar to above, but with golden tipped foliage. Thornless.
- ***Sophora japonica* – Japanese Pagoda Tree** – A neat tree to 12m with fern-like lime green leaves. Produces creamy white flowers in summer, followed by a display of golden foliage in autumn. May distort paving with its strong buttress roots.
- ***Ulmus parvifolia* ‘Yarralumla Clone’ – Chinese Elm** – a grafted variety with fine pendulous leaves and a smooth decorative trunk. Will keep some leaves in winter. Can grow 15m tall and 15m wide, with yellow autumn foliage. Very beautiful, sculptural tree for medium – large gardens.



Large Trees – over 15 metres tall

- ***Liriodendron tulipifera*** – Tulip Tree – A large, leafy tree to 16m. The large lime-green leaves turn golden in autumn. Produces unusual green/yellow flowers after 6-8 years. Requires protection from hot sun and wind.
- ***Fraxinus excelsior* ‘Aurea’** – Golden Ash – A slow-growing but showy tree to 16m. Vibrant yellow leaves year-round. Bright yellow trunk.
- ***Liquidambar styraciflua*** – Sweet Gum – A large tree to 18m with a narrow, conical shape. Yellow, red and orange autumn foliage. Requires extra water in dry periods. A known ‘drain clogger’ in areas with concrete or terracotta pipes. Plant well away from pipes, paving, houses, etc. Recommended only for large blocks.
- ***Quercus palustris*** – Pin Oak – A large conical tree to 18m. Red Autumn foliage, which remains on the tree for longer than most trees in Canberra. Loves extra water in Summer. Recommended only for large gardens.
- ***Platanus x acerifolia* ‘Bloodgood’** – London Plane – A large, bushy tree to 20m x 15m. Smooth decorative trunk and large, lime green foliage make it an attractive specimen tree. Fine hairs on the foliage and the seed pods can cause allergies.

