



# Favorite Trees of Distinction

Annette Ipsan, Master Gardener

*Dear Master Gardener,  
I'd like to add some unusual and interesting trees to my landscape. Do you have any suggestions?*

*-Nici Spangler*

Trees add substance to a landscape, especially when they are chosen with care. Whether they provide shade or screening, a burst of colorful blooms or flash of fall color, trees are a must in any size yard.

Fortunately, nurseries are carrying more than a few hard-to-find trees that fill special needs in gardens. Whether you are looking for a different form, unusual flower, smaller size or fall color, chances are you will find just the right tree. Here are a few favorite trees of distinction.

Styrax is a lovely smaller tree with standout flowers. Delicate white bell-like blossoms dangle from multi-layered branches in May and June for a dazzling floral display. Only 15 to 25 feet at maturity, the styrax or Japanese snowbell is a perfect tree for a smaller yard and looks its best against a dark evergreen. Try to find 'Pink Chimes,' a newer pink-blooming variety, or 'Emerald Pagoda' with dark green leaves.

Do you wish camellias could bloom on a tree? Your wish is granted in the stewartia which covers itself in white camellia-like blooms in July. Another unique feature is stewartia's bark. It turns shades of gray, rust and orange as the tree ages, giving it spectacular winter interest. Often grown in a striking multi-stemmed form, stewartia is another small treasure, reaching heights of only 20 to 25 feet.

If you love the look of a classic southern magnolia, but thought you could never fit one in your yard, take heart. The 'Little Gem' magnolia has the same large, glossy green leaves and massive white fragrant blooms as its larger cousins, but comes in a much smaller size: 15 to 20 feet. It's an elegant addition to the landscape, needing only a sunny location and protection from the wind.

Sourwood is another smaller tree of distinction. Its long, elegant leaves offer good contrast in the landscape and if you see it in bloom you *will* want this tree. Cascades of tiny white flowers cloak the sourwood in June and July. And its fall color is a bright red. Tuck this 25- to 30-foot beauty into a mixed tree collection and wait for the inevitable "oohs" and "aahs" from envious neighbors.

If you think bigger is better, consider the dawn redwood. Defining majestic, the dawn redwood soars to heights of 60 or 100 feet with evergreen-like needles that hang in great sweeps. Its needles color a reddish brown in the fall, then drop to reveal a handsome red bark with deep ridges.

Another tree with surprising fall color is the 'Autumn Applause' white ash. Looking quite elegant with its matching sets of leaves year-round, this ash puts on a special show for fall. When all the other trees are busy turning gold, orange, red or brown, this 50- to 80-foot ash colors a spectacular purple. It's a show-stopper, especially when paired with other trees that tinge yellow.

My favorite mellow yellow tree is the ginko. What's not to love? It has a distinctive bell-shaped leaf, an impressive size at maturity – 50 to 60 feet or so – and a clear yellow fall leaf color. Add to that its dramatic habit of shedding all its leaves at once if frost threatens – whoosh!—and you have a tree that is impossible not to love.

Want more ideas? How about a weeping redbud that cascades tiny purple blooms in spring and giant heart-shaped leaves throughout the year. Maybe a scarlet curls willow is more your cup of tea with corkscrew branches and bark that tinges red in the winter.

The variety of new and interesting trees is endless. I hope you will try one or more of these special trees in your yard. They are all marvelous in their own unique way and will add grace and beauty to your landscape for years to come.

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