

“Special” Trees

Each of these ornamental trees is special in its own right, yet none is complicated enough to require a publication of its own. Flowers, bark, fall color, and interesting shapes are the qualities that tie these trees together, and all are worthy of a special place in your landscape. They are described below in no particular order. We can usually find most of these trees for special orders when they’re not in stock, but availability is sometimes limited.

FRANKLINIA

Franklinia altamaha is also called Franklin Tree. Found in Georgia in 1770, Franklinia hasn’t been seen in the wild since 1790. As a result, it can be a rather unique addition to your garden. Growing to about twenty feet in height and ten feet in width (or more), Franklinia has dark gray bark with vertical fissures and an interesting curvy branching pattern that creates a somewhat open appearance and an upright oval shape. Fragrant late-summer flowers (white with a yellow center about three inches across) adorn this tree shortly before (and sometimes coincident with) a knockout fall color of yellow to orange to red. Franklinia tolerates moist, but well-drained soils and tolerates light shade but performs best in full sun. Almost unrivaled as a specimen for any landscape.

STYRAX



Styrax japonica may also be referred to as Japanese snowbell or snowdrop. A broad-spreading, low-branched “shrubby” tree, Styrax can grow to twenty feet or more with a similar spread and is generally free of insect and disease problems. When very few other trees are blooming, Styrax provides a beautiful display of small white flowers that hang down from the branches like little white bells in late May to June. Experts call Styrax “a

handsome small tree for any situation.” ‘PinkChimes’ is a pink-blooming variety that is sometimes available and ‘Pendula’ is a rarely available weeping variety that reaches only about ten to twelve feet in height.

FRINGETREE

Chionanthus virginicus (occasionally called Grancy Graybeard) is a small to medium tree reaching heights of fifteen to twenty feet and similar widths. Its shape is variable but usually somewhat open and very natural looking. Fringetree grows about one foot per year, and its best attribute is its spring flowers which appear in May and are, as the name suggests, somewhat like fringe. Each of its creamy white flowers is borne in six to eight inch long fleecy, fine textured panicles that persist for several weeks. Fringetree prefers full sun and its fruit, which appears in August-September, is blue and —



(Continued on page 2)



Special Trees cont.

(Continued from page 1)

while usually hidden by the leaves — is loved by birds. Fall color is variable but can range from a bright to golden yellow. As a native tree, this species attracts very few pests and diseases. Dirr states that “even Dogwood does not carry itself with such refinement, dignity and class when in flower.”

JAPANESE STEWARTIA

Stewartia psuedocamellia is a magnificent small to medium-sized oval to pyramidal tree reaching twenty to twenty-five feet in height with a spread of about two-thirds that size. Its large white flowers (with yellow- orange centers) show up in mid-summer and closely resemble those of the Camellia — hence the name. Fall color ranges from yellow to dark reddish-purple and this tree's bark provides for outstanding winter character with sinuous, peeling strands ranging in color from cream to green and other colors. Largely free from insect and disease problems.

SERVICEBERRY (*Amelanchier* hybrids)

This tree has so many positive attributes it is difficult to describe its best feature. Serviceberry stands up to both full sun and medium shade, will tolerate all but the wettest soils, and is essentially pest-free. Small white flowers appear in showy clusters right before the dogwoods bloom (a good full-sun alternative to dogwoods), bright red fruit appears near the first of June and turns purple before being consumed by birds, and fall color ranges from a mix of yellow-orange to a fiery red. Serviceberry's fruit is not usually messy and supposedly makes a good pie if you can harvest them before the birds eat them. Naturally multi-stemmed or growing as a large shrub, Serviceberry can be trained as a single or multi-stemmed small tree. 'Autumn Brilliance,' the variety we most often carry, is a small tree reaching fifteen to twenty feet tall with a similar spread.

CAROLINA SILVERBELLS



Halesia carolina is found in nature as an understory tree on mountain slopes and along streams. As such it is quite tolerant of moisture but does require adequate drainage. Probably reaching thirty feet in height and twenty feet in width in our area, Silverbells blooms in mid to late spring with white to pale rose, bell-shaped flowers very similar to those of *Styrax japonica*, described above — although Silverbells flowers in small clusters as opposed to along the branches. Naturally low-branched with upright or irregular branching, Silverbells does well in full sun or semi-shade and makes a handsome specimen or



Special Trees cont.

lawn tree that is particularly effective against a dark evergreen background. Fall color is yellow though not spectacular. SPORADICALLY AVAILABLE.

VITEX (*Vitex agnus-castus*)

We often use the scientific name of this large shrub/small tree whose common name is CHASTETREE. In Greensboro, plants have reached about twenty to twenty-five feet with a spread of about fifteen to twenty feet and, as the texts suggest, Vitex enjoys our hot summers. While tolerant of some shade, Vitex would prefer full sun. Imagine a twenty foot tree covered with clusters of small blue to lavender flowers in July-August. Bourne in paniced clusters, the flowers are most similar to those of Butterfly Bush and can be overwhelming. Summer texture is interesting though fall color is dull, but the late summer flowers are worth the investment. Fast-growing, Vitex may not deserve a “specimen” location but definitely deserves a place in the landscape.

PERSIAN PARROTIA

Parrotia persica is a small single-stemmed tree or large multi-stemmed shrub that may reach more than twenty feet high and fifteen feet wide. Relatively pest-free, Parrotia’s flowers are interesting but not showy and it does well in full sun to light shade. Undoubtedly its best attribute is fall color, which can — at the same time —include yellow, orange, purple, and scarlet, as well as every color in between. The bark is exfoliating and ranges from gray, green, white to brown—a welcome asset to the winter landscape although it does take some time to develop. A fine accent in the right location, perhaps a specimen in an ideal location, this tree definitely merits a place along the fringes of the landscape for its fall color alone.

GOLDEN RAIN TREE (*Koelreuteria paniculata*)

An upright-growing tree, even gangly in youth, Golden raintree eventually develops into a twenty-five to thirty foot tree with a lesser spread. Its golden-yellow flowers appear in June or July and hang down from the branches like “golden rain,” each cluster hanging down a foot or more. Preferring full sun and demanding good drainage (although tolerant of well-drained but moist soils), Golden raintree can grow quite fast and produces a unique yellow fruit in the fall. The only way to describe this fruit is to say it looks like an inflated version of Japanese origami. Fall color is not its best attribute, but under the right conditions may be an attractive golden-yellow. Because the tree can grow quite fast, it may tend to be somewhat weak-wooded, an important factor in locating a specimen.



GOLDEN CHAINTREE ☠️

A completely different species from Golden raintree, Golden chaintree exhibits some of the

(Continued on page 4)



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Special Trees cont.

(Continued from page 3)

same characteristics, particularly the long golden panicles of flowers that hang down in early summer. Otherwise, *Laburnum x watereri* is a smaller tree, growing to only about fifteen feet in height with a slightly smaller spread, and it needs to be protected from the hot afternoon sun in summer —so place it carefully to receive full morning sun and afternoon shade, and avoid wet areas. **MANY PARTS OF THE CHAINTREE ARE TOXIC OR EVEN DANGEROUS.** The seeds contained in the fruit are the most toxic part of this tree but, if ingested, any part of this tree—leaves, flowers, fruit — can be dangerous to small children and pets.

SOURWOOD (*Oxydendrum arboreum*)



Cascading white bell-shaped flowers in groups four to ten inches long and wide cover the leaves of Sourwood like a drooping, lacy veil in late June - early July. In fall the leaves turn a brilliant yellow, red, and purple all at the same time and, in winter, the grayish-brown to black furrowed bark stands in stark contrast to our occasional snow. Truly a tree for all seasons, Sourwood may reach twenty-five to thirty feet high and about twenty feet wide. Medium-

slow growing (close to one foot per year), this tree will tolerate light to medium shade but performs best in full sun.

RED HORSECHESTNUT

Aesculus X carnea is a broad-rounded tree of about thirty feet with lustrous green compound leaves that have five to seven leaflets. Large (six to eight by three to four inch panicles) rose-red flowers bloom in May-June and somewhat resemble a bottle brush. Very showy in flower and extremely popular in England and northern Virginia, this tree is less well-known here and therefore underused. Fall color is bright yellow in the right circumstances. Both 'Briotii' and 'O'Neill' hybrids have larger, deeper red flowers.

RED BUCKEYE, *Aesculus pavia*, is closely related to, and shares many of the same characteristics of, the Horsechestnut. Buckeye grows to only about twelve or fifteen feet high and wider and flowers earlier, in April-May. Both trees prefer full sun and good drainage.

ORNAMENTAL MAPLES

While Japanese maples are very popular, other varieties of smaller growing maples are less well-known but still provide strong ornamental qualities:

TRIDENT MAPLE. *Acer buergeranum* may reach twenty-five feet in height and width and has a distinctive, three-lobed leaf (hence the name "trident"). Unless otherwise trained, Trident usually is low-branched with multiple trunks, and its bark becomes gray-brown-orange with an



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Special Trees cont.

exfoliating, plated character. Fall color is yellow, orange, and red, and it develops somewhat later than other maples in late October to early November.

PAPERBARK. *Acer griseum* has an upright-oval habit and reaches twenty to thirty feet high and fifteen to thirty feet wide. Its trifoliate leaves are dark to bluish green in summer, turn bronze-russet-red in fall, and can be spectacular. As the name suggests, the bark of this tree is its greatest asset. Young stems are deep to reddish brown and exfoliate in thin papery layers to reveal cinnamon brown underbark (usually exfoliating by the second year). Another tree that is magnificent when highlighted by a fresh snow.

AMUR MAPLE. *Acer ginnala* is another broad-growing small tree with a multi-stemmed habit that reaches around twenty feet high and wide. Smooth grayish-brown bark and darker striations accent the uniquely shaped leaves (three-lobed with a large, distinctive center lobe) which turn from glossy dark green to shades of yellow and red in fall. All three of these trees prefer full sun, good drainage, and perform well as small specimens or container plants.

CHINESE PISTACHE

Pistacia chinensis grows to about thirty feet high and wide and makes a rather unique lawn, park, or street tree. Chinese pistache needs full sun and prefers moist, well-drained soils but will tolerate poor, droughty soils quite well. Its flowers are produced in April but are not particularly showy. The fruit (related to, but not the “pistachio” nut) can be quite showy in October - November and appear in clusters of 1/4 inch “berries” maturing to either red or robin’s egg blue in the same cluster. The Pistache’s fall color is its most outstanding asset, turning brilliant orange to orange-red and holding late into the season. Amazingly free of insect and disease problems.

LITTLELEAF LINDEN



Tilia cordata offers uniquely fragrant yellowish flowers in June –July. Reaching around thirty feet in height and width within a reasonable time, it makes an excellent medium to large shade tree in just about any situation. Leaves are dark shiny green in summer and change to an often- brilliant yellow in fall. In Europe, Lindens are often pruned into tall hedges. ‘Greenspire’ is the variety most often available —it grows with a strong central leader and a nice branching habit. Grows about one foot per year.

KATSURA TREE

Cercidiphyllum japonicum has broad heart-shaped leaves (much like the redbuds) that open reddish-purple, turn bluish-green for the summer, and exhibit a yellow to apricot-orange fall color. The bark is brown and on mature trees develops a shaggy character much like our native Shagbark Hickory. Katsura has no serious disease or insect problems but will usually re-

(Continued on page 6)



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Special Trees cont.

(Continued from page 5)

quire supplemental watering during hot, dry periods and initial establishment. Medium to fast growing, this tree is good for shade in lawns, parks, or as a street tree; and it reaches nearly thirty feet high and wider. Flowers are a purplish-tinged rosy pink and are effective for about three weeks in March –April. Katsura does well in full sun to light shade. In addition, there is a Weeping Katsura Tree that has the same basic features but is distinguished, as its name suggests, by a graceful weeping form.



DAWN REDWOOD (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*)

This tree is a little brother to the giant Redwoods on the West Coast! It is a very fast growing tree which tops out around 60 to 80 feet high and 30 to 40 feet wide. Deciduous tree, having a beautiful feathery-fine leaf which shows up well against its dark reddish-brown bark. A strong central leader gives this tree a great pyramidal shape. An excellent tree for parks, golf courses, street plantings, or in masses (or groupings) for screening purposes. Prefers “wet feet.”

BALD CYPRESS (*Taxodium distichum*)

This is a very rapidly growing deciduous conifer. Bald Cypress is a medium to large tree, reaching heights of fifty to seventy feet and widths of twenty to eighty feet! A native tree found from Delaware to Florida, Bald Cypress is often found next to lakes, bogs, or other wet areas. This is a great tree for parks, lake areas, or just large estates where it makes a unique specimen!

WEeping EUROPEAN BEECH

Fagus sylvatica ‘Pendula’ is by far, in most opinions, the most beautiful weeping form of Beech for the Triad region. Reaching heights of 30 to 40 feet, it becomes even wider than that at maturity. Its downward-reaching branches give it a tent-shaped feature. Leaves are a lustrous green, becoming golden bronze in fall. This is an excellent specimen for anyone’s yard!

GINKGO BILOBA



Often called the Maidenhair Tree, *Ginkgo biloba* is a very impressive specimen tree! In youth, it has a very open shape, but with age it takes on an extraordinary aspect, reaching heights of fifty to eighty feet and widths of thirty to forty feet. An easy to plant tree, it likes full sun and open spaces. It adapts well in most locations. Beautiful bright yellow fall color makes this tree a prime addition to anyone’s landscape. Slow growing!

BLACK GUM

Nyssa sylvatica is one of our most exquisite native trees. Somewhat pyramidal in shape when



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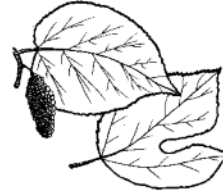
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Special Trees cont.

young, it grows more rounded with age. Prefers well-drained, semi-shaded areas. Fall color is what makes this tree a winner — it's pretty much a fluorescent light show in shades of yellow, orange, scarlet, and purple! Grows 30 to 50 feet tall and 20 to 30 feet wide.

WEeping MULBERRY (*Morus alba 'Pendula'*)

A very nice weeping tree that would enhance any landscape. Nicely weeping shape with an unusually-shaped leaf which has sparkling yellow fall color. Weeping Mulberry enjoys areas which have full to part sun and moist well-drained soil. Will become about fifteen to twenty feet tall and wide.



HEPTACODIUM (*Heptacodium mikonoides*)

Also known as Seven-Son Flower, this is a good substitute for Crepe Myrtle. About fifteen to twenty feet tall and wide, its stems have a nice rich brown color, solid in appearance. This tree has a very irregular growth habit, so you may have to prune it to maintain the shape you want. The exciting part of this plant is its unusual leaf. Heptacodium features white flowers in August and September, and the exquisite fruited sepal that comes after the flower — a beautiful rosy-purple — is even more effective than the flower. This touch of color adds immensely to the tree's texture in October.

FLOWERING JAPANESE APRICOT

Prunus mume is a wonderful tree that reaches about fifteen to twenty-five feet in height and width. The most wonderful feature of this tree is its early bloom period, from February into March. It likes well drained but moist areas in full sun. 'Kobai' and 'Peggy Clarke' are the two varieties we generally carry (Apricot is a very difficult tree to find).

HAWTHORNE

Crataegus spp. are truly unique trees which add much interest to any landscape. Growing to about 20-35 feet tall and about as wide, this tree has nice creamy white flowers in spring, offset by a lustrous green leaf. It also features excellent red berries in September and October. A hard tree to obtain, but the varieties we generally carry are 'Winter King' and 'Washington'.



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