

Colorful Small Trees



Photo to be credited to David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: The chaste tree is a small tree that produces spikes of blue flowers during the summer. This particular cultivar, called 'Shoal Creek', has an even more compact form.

Daniel E. Mullins is Extension Horticulture Agent in the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Santa Rosa County .
<http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>

June 10, 2004

Small yards in modern suburbs often don't provide enough space for large growing trees, so more and more residents are becoming interested in the smaller types of trees. Even residents with plenty of yard space are interested in small growing trees to provide under-story interest and for adding accent to the landscape.

A tree species is defined as small in University of Florida publications if it grows no larger than twenty five feet in height. Fortunately there are many within this category from which to choose. There are both evergreen and deciduous species. Some are noted for their leaf color or shape, while others provide accent through colorful flowers.

Following are some highly recommended small trees that are adapted to the northern Gulf Coast :

- Chaste Tree is one of the most outstanding small summer flowering trees for accenting sunny areas. Gardeners who have tried this tree based on my recommendation have made a point to let me know how much pleasure that it has brought. Botanically it is *Vitex angus-castus*, belonging to the *Verbenaceae* family, producing violet blue flowers throughout the hot months.
- Crape myrtle comes in many sizes and growth forms, with several cultivars having the ability to reach a height of twenty to twenty five feet at maturity. Flower color choices include white, pink, lavender, purple and red. Once established, the hotter and brighter the location, the better crape myrtles like it. With a little care, including the removal of old flower spikes to prevent seed set, they can be kept flowering from June until fall.
- Fringe tree, *Chionanthus virginicus*, is also known as Old Man's Beard or Grancy Gray Beard because of its large clusters of airy, long, fringe-like white blooms. Each spring the sight of local flowering specimens brings questions from gardeners who are unfamiliar with this unusual native tree. It is not the most common tree found in local nurseries because until a few years ago it was difficult to propagate. Fringe tree is sure to

Colorful Small Trees

become more popular as more nurseries are becoming familiar with reproducing it.

■ Japanese maples are so beautiful that a healthy specimen can literally stop traffic! Though we are at the southern end of its range here along the Gulf Coast, it can be grown with careful attention to site selection and watering. Choose planting sites that receive some shade from afternoon sun and irrigate to prevent sharp fluctuations in moisture.

■ Deciduous flowering magnolias are among the first plants to bloom each year. They are also known as saucer magnolias, Japanese magnolias, and Oriental magnolias. The large tulip-shaped flowers begin providing color and accent in February. Depending upon the species or cultivar, common color choices include white, pink and purple.

There are many other well adapted small growing trees that can be effectively used in both large and small landscapes. These include redbud, dogwood, hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.), Loquat, Silver Bell (*Halesia diptera*), crabapple (*Malus angustifolia*), wax myrtle, Parkinsonia or Jerusalem thorn, Chickasaw plum, flatwoods plum, styrax, and sweet viburnum.

Question of the Week: I have a small shady area near my back door that would benefit from some color. What do you recommend?

Answer: Caladiums perform well in small shady spots. Local nurseries and garden centers are usually well stocked with caladium bulbs (actually tubers) starting in April. You will find bulbs in various sizes. Choose the larger bulbs if cost is not a serious issue. They will provide full sized leaves sooner than the smaller bulbs.

Prepare the soil by adding and incorporating a generous amount of an organic amendment such as peat, manure or compost. Plant them with the bud side up at a depth of one to two inches.

###