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Top Ten Tried & True Ornamental Trees & Shrubs for North Texas

What Should I Plant?

So you've an area in mind to plant an ornamental tree, or a new shrub bed that needs a screening plant, or just want something that will give you amazing color... now, you just need to decide what that perfect plant will be! This guide is a quick rundown on some of our best ornamental trees and shrubs in North Texas, with eventual growing sizes, maintenance, and planting tips to get the best out of your new selections. We carry hundreds of varieties of different plants, and each has some look or function that makes it stand out, but if you want a listing of easy to care for plants that will give you a great look and not require lots of long-term maintenance, that's what we're talking about today.

Ornamental Trees - Smaller growing trees and very large shrubs used as small trees throughout the landscape:

- **Crapemyrtle** - Taller growing crapemyrtles come in a riot of reds, pinks, white, and purplish colors in heights from 10' to 25'+. You choose a desired top height and a color, and there's probably a crapemyrtle choice that will give you exactly that combination.
- **Smoke tree** - Drought tolerant, 10'Tx10'W, most common varieties have interesting purple or sometimes chartreuse new growth with plumes of airy blooms that look a bit like smoke from a distance.
- **Chaste tree (Vitex)** - 15'Tx15'W, gorgeous spikes of blue or white blooms during the early summertime. A very drought tolerant, fast growing plant. The plant in our test garden is stunning - if you ever want to see why we love this plant, go look at it and see.
- **Hollies (various types)** - There are *dozens* of good, larger growing hollies in a range of heights and shapes, but Nellie R. Stevens, Oakland, and Yaupon hollies are outstanding. Dark green, tough as nails, and many types of holly have showy berries late season. Most are evergreen!
- **Japanese maple (shade)** - Japanese maples have dozens of unique combinations of texture and leaf color that make them a visual centerpoint in any shady bed. AS A NOTE: there really isn't a Japanese maple that's good for full sun in our area - they'll tolerate dappled sunshine or morning sun at first, and a bit more when mature. We emphasize this because most grower tags read, "Full to partial sun". These tags are accurate... in the state of Oregon, where most of the best Japanese maples are grown. Not here!
- **Texas mountain laurel** - 15' tall average, fragrant chains of blue blooms early in the season on an evergreen plant. Needs to be in a dry, raised area for the best results. Smells like a fragrant wisteria.
- **Redbud** - Many types exist, heights from 6' to 25' tall at maturity, blooms before the leaves emerge in spring, many types have interesting foliage colors or weeping forms. A great plant in light shade, still good in full sun with a bit of care until the plant is established.
- **Eastern red cedar** - (Native). Plant a row of these in dry, neglected areas, and you'll have a great evergreen screen that will survive on just our natural rainfall once established. 30'Tx15'W at maturity,
- **Little Gem/Teddy Bear magnolias** - Not all magnolias are huge! 'Little Gem' and 'Teddy Bear' magnolias will reach around 20'Tx12-15'W at maturity, and bloom huge, 6" diameter blooms on an evergreen plant. These two selections stay darker green than many magnolias, and so they're preferred.
- **Desert willow** - Drought tolerant 15'Tx15'W plant has pink or burgundy blooms starting in summer into the early fall. The blooms will remind you of snapdragons!

Shrubs for Sun - Plants for full sun to light shade:

- **Hollies (many types)** - There are many types of shorter holly that are beautiful and tough as nails! Excellent examples include dwarf Burford, dwarf Yaupon, and needlepoint hollies.
- **Kaleidoscope abelia** - This abelia is a shorter growing plant, between 2 and 3 feet tall, with magnificently variegated leaves. Plant in full sun for the best color, with yellow-green variegation enhanced by dramatic oranges during cooler weather.
- **Junipers (many types)** - Very good for full sun plantings in low irrigation areas, junipers come in a vast array of sizes, but of particular note are the carpeting junipers, like Blue Pacific and Green Mound - ground hugging junipers that drape over walls and edges with interesting textures.
- **Texas sage** - Great for especially dry areas; once well established, it's fine with just our normal rainfall throughout the year. 4-5'Tx4-5'W, the plant will bloom beautiful lavender/pink blooms after natural rainfalls in the late spring and through the summertime.
- **Nandinas (many types)** - Tough plants! Ranging in size from 1.5' tall all the way to 6'+. Great fall and winter red color during the colder weather, and many of the newer types show pink and red new growth throughout the year.
- **Sunshine Ligustrum** - An ideal low-growing hedge plant, "Sunshine" ligustrum grows to 3-4' tall x 3-4' wide and really stands out in the landscape. Bright golden foliage on a sterile, non-flowering plant.
- **Indian hawthorn (disease resistant types only)** - From 2'T to 10'T, Indian hawthorn bloom soft pink or white bloom clusters in the earliest part of the spring. Not all Indian hawthorns are equal - plant the most disease resistant varieties for our area only, such as Olivia, Eleanor Taber, and Georgia Petite.
- **Crapemyrtle** - It's listed again, because it's still 3-4 months of beautiful summertime blooming. Weeping and dwarf crapemyrtles grow anywhere from 18" tall to six feet, best for full sunshine.
- **Purple Diamond loropetalum** - This plant shows good purple color probably nine months out of the year, and at least a modest amount of purplish color year 'round. At 4'Tx4'W, Purple Diamond isn't huge like the original purple Loropetalum variety sold in our area.
- **Ornamental grasses (many types) - not a shrub, but shrub-sized!** There are a huge number of ornamental grasses used in our landscapes that range in size from as short as 1' tall to as high as 10', meaning that *we use them like shrubs*. Most of the grasses we use are perennial and drought resistant when established. Use grasses to add motion and flow to an area - the grass blades move nicely in the breeze. Notable types we recommend: dwarf 'Hameln' fountain grass (2-3'T), 'Adagio' dwarf maiden grass (3-4'T), and "Ivory Feathers" dwarf pampas (4'-6'T).

Shrubs for Shade - Plants for the full shade to morning/dappled sun areas in the landscape:

- **Hollies (many types)** - Hollies are so adaptable that many types tolerate moderate shade just fine. Carissa holly, which reaches 2-3'Tx3-4'W, is one of our favorites for shadier areas.
- **Yews (Japanese & other types)** - Shade tolerant and beautiful! Available in upright and spreading varieties. Japanese yew have foliage that looks like little else that grows in our area. It will remind you of plants growing around the Pacific Northwest. Emerald Spreader is a gorgeous lower growing version.
- **Boxwoods (many types)** - Many types exist, but two of our favorites are Wintergreen, which is a beautifully dark green variety, and Green Tower, which is a nicely tight columnar grower to 6' tall.
- **Pittosporum** - These rounded shrubs do well in shade; the dwarf varieties like Wheeler's and Mojo make nicely compact plants around 2' tall and look great as a low filler around tall interest items like Japanese maples.
- **Hydrangea** - Bloom best in morning sun and come in a wide range of sizes. Endless Summer repeat-blooming types get around 4'Tx4'W. Blue and pink standard varieties bloom based upon soil pH and metals present in the soil--feed aluminum sulphate for great blue color, horticultural lime for the deepest pink. Oakleaf hydrangeas are generally taller, with white spikes of bloom. Hydrangeas are deciduous.

- **Osmanthus** - The traditional "tea olive", the green leafed version is taller and fragrant; Goshiki osmanthus is an interesting dwarfed plant that's 3-4'Tx3-4'W with nicely yellow variegated leaves. Best in partial sunshine.
- **Aucuba (deepest shade)** - Large, tropical-looking leaves in both solid green and variegated yellow-green leaf patterns, aucuba must be in full shade or only filtered sunshine, as it easily burns. 4'Tx4'W.
- **Cleyera** - Deep green, waxy leaves are red-bronze on all new growth, on a plant easily maintained between 4 and 6 feet tall. Good as a hedgerow in shade.
- **Mahonia** - Leatherleaf mahonia has a bold, dark green leaf with yellow flowers and blue berries afterwards at 4-6'Tx4-5'W; Oregon grape mahonia is more compact. 'Soft Caress' is a Chinese mahonia variety without scratchy points on the leaves and a compact form, 3'Tx3-4'W. A dramatically different foliage pattern from most shrubs grown in our area.
- **Ferns (many types) - not a shrub, but shrub-sized!** - Ferns add foliage interest that works well in the shadier areas of the yard. Autumn and holly ferns are evergreen, in the 2-3' tall height range. Southern wood ferns are the classic fern leaf most of us bring to mind when thinking about a fern, and Japanese painted ferns have grey and maroon highlights on a compact fern from 1.5-2'Tx2'W. Japanese painted ferns were the perennial of the year in 2004.