

November/Samhain Grow your own. We in B.I.G. would like to encourage all to plant even one Tree. From now until March is the time for planting of Trees.

Grow your own

'No garden is too small for a tree', and 'why not plant for posterity?' -

Could you possibly leave a patch free, about a metre-square? This is all you need to accommodate a tree.

Why bother? you might ask. Trees supply food and shelter for the birds; provides shade for the delicate woodland plants that you might grow at its feet; makes oxygen for the planet; and leads the eye up and frees the spirit.

Other than that, a tree may be a living calendar, changing its appearance with every season. But most of all, it may be a thing of great beauty - which is a compelling reason for planting one or more in your garden.

How to choose a suitable tree? First, let me tell you what not to do. Please, don't pile down to the garden centre and grab the first one that takes your fancy - unless you have acres of land, and plenty of space for mistakes. Not all trees are suitable for all gardens. And as your tree may be with you for a very long time, it makes sense to choose with some care.

When you do visit the garden centre - do ask for help - and advise before choosing a tree or trees.

If it does, then is it the right tree for you.

If you can have only a single specimen, you'll want it to have more than one season of interest. You'll get more bang for your buck from a deciduous tree: coloured spring buds, flowers, fruits and autumn leaves may all feature. Crab apple (*Malus*), rowan and whitebeam (*Sorbus*), flowering cherry (*Prunus*), and hawthorn (*Crataegus*) are the classic choices. All the above have varieties that are fairly unfussy, and will do in any reasonable soil.

They are not self-fertile, and need to mate - vicariously, via a bee - with another apple in flower (which can be in a neighbour's garden).

Less widely-planted, but with a year-round performance are the june berries (*Amelanchier*). Like the trees above, they are members of the rose family (*Rosaceae*), and have pretty flowers, juicy fruits and excellent autumn colour.

If you are planting for your children and grandchildren, the exceptionally slow-growing paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*), whose trunk unravels into rolls of rusty tissue paper, will top 15 metres after 50 years.

One of the more dramatic plants for a compact space is the foxglove tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*). Prune it back to a metre or two from the ground each spring and it will produce enormous leaves, 40 or 50 cms across, which prompt all visitors to exclaim, "What's that?"

Finally, a word to readers with an acre or more of garden: do plant some trees that will grow up to be large and splendid specimens. You won't see them in your lifetime, but someone has to plant for posterity. Wouldn't it be nice if it were you?

Go neirí an bothair libh! Is feidir linn!