

MEETING REPORT - Trees for the smaller Garden

Tom Coles, who judged our daffodil and tulip classes, was as interesting and entertaining as ever. He gave us a short explanation of what a show judge looks for: uniformity, condition, and whether the specimen is true to its class, and is to the show specification. Food for thought for the Village show!

He then showed us numerous wonderful slides of the most unusual and colourful trees, mostly from Writtle College where he lectures. He gave so much information that we have included this on a separate sheet for you.

For most small gardens you need to think of trees at 4m or less. With careful pruning you can keep most specimens under this height. When considering a tree, look at the height and spread at maturity, and how long it will take to mature. Beware, as “dwarf” conifers can get very large - they just do it slowly. What is the life of the tree, will you have to buy another in 20 to 30 years? (*Well I won't be around then! Ed*)

Consider why you want to grow a tree. Is it for fragrance, leaf colour, bark colour, flowers, fruit or interesting sculptural shape, be it columnar, weeping or other shape. What position is best for it, will it tolerate drought, does it need full sun, what soil pH is best? Is it fully hardy, and does it need protection from wind? Importantly, does it need a pollinator, and will you have to buy one as well? Trees can be successfully grown in large pots, but if you are going to grow in a container, then consider what may be difficult if you need to move or re-pot it. John Innes No 3 is a good compost for container growing. Container grown trees are often best with a watering system. Pruning should be carried out when instructed and done regularly, remembering that lopping a tree severely alters its shape. Carry pruning out at the right time of year for that species.

If trees are staked, check the ties each year and replace before disaster strikes, especially if the tree is in a windy spot. Check that the stakes themselves are strong and undamaged and replace when needed. Remember that most trees are grafted, so root stock will sucker from the base of the tree. Remove all suckers as soon as you see them. When planting, water well and put perforated tubing into the planting hole so that the roots get plenty, and be careful not to let them dry out completely. As ever, we had lots of questions and noted trees that we had never encountered before. We look forward to seeing Tom again next year.