



“Solutions for Your Life”

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Small Trees for Small Spaces

By Pam Brown, Urban Horticulture Extension Agent

While Live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) is a wonderful native tree, it sometimes is planted into landscapes that will not be large enough for the grand size of this tree as it comes to maturity. Smaller home lots really do call out for trees that will not overpower the house and yard 20 years down the road. Fortunately there are some lovely trees that are smaller in stature, are drought tolerant and may even survive better in hurricane force winds due to their lower center of gravity.

One of my favorites is the **Crape myrtle** (*Lagerstroemia indica*). There are varieties of this tree that will fit any small lot. Dwarf varieties are from 2 – 3 feet tall, semi dwarf grow 3 – 6 feet tall, medium trees are 6 – 12 feet tall and the tall trees are greater than 12 feet up to the broad, tall Natchez variety that grows 20 – 30 feet tall. These trees are deciduous (lose their leaves in the fall), but the blooms of summer and the sculptural bark in the winter make up for that fact. Many of the varieties also have wonderful exfoliating bark as a bonus.

Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) is another tree that is too large for small lots, but a newer dwarf variety of this tree called ‘**Little Gem**’ is much smaller and compact growing. ‘Little Gem’ still has the wonderful large fragrant blooms of the species to boot. It is a slow growing tree reaching only 15 – 20 feet in height at maturity and barely 8 – 10 feet in width.

Besides the dwarf magnolia and crape myrtles, several of the other small trees have lovely blooms to grace the spring and summer. Two great native trees are **Sweet Acacia** (*Acacia farnesiana*) and **Yaupon Holly** (*Ilex vomitoria*). Sweet Acacia grows to 15 feet in full sun and is drought and salt tolerant. An added bonus is the sweet-smelling yellow, pom-pom flowers. The weeping form of Yaupon Holly is especially pretty. It grows in full or part sun up to about 20 feet tall. It too is drought and salt tolerant and has small white flowers in the spring and fleshy red fruit in the fall that is favored by birds. **Jerusalem thorn** (*Parkinsonia aculeate*) is a fast growing tree that achieves a height of about 25 feet with a graceful spreading crown, green bark that sports thorns, and feathery leaves. The clusters of yellow blooms in the spring are a real delight. **Trumpet trees** (*Tabebuia spp.*) can grow from 15 to 30 feet tall and are briefly deciduous in the late winter. They have an open canopy and will produce yellow, pink or purple trumpet shaped flowers in profusion in the early spring. Trumpet trees have a better form if they are trained to a single trunk and are staked until they are six to eight feet tall.

Several small trees that we like to turn into hedges are **Sweet Viburnum** (*Viburnum odoratissimum*) and **Glossy privet** (*Ligustrum lucidum*). Both of these can be allowed to grow into small trees of 15 – 20 feet in height. They usually have multiple trunks that are attractive as a focal point in a garden. Podocarpus (*Podocarpus macrophyllus*) grows slowly and withstands pruning well. These trees can attain 50 feet in height, but are most often maintained smaller.

I cannot leave out palm trees. Because of their small footprint, many are just right for small spaces. **Pigmy date palm** (*Phoenix robelini*) is slow growing and usually stays under 10 feet tall. This palm is especially attractive planted in groups of two or three. **Windmill palm** (*Trachycarpus fortunei*) grows five to 10 feet tall. Even palms that are taller growing like our state tree **Sabal or Cabbage Palm** (*Sabal palmetto*) that grows to be 40 to 50 feet tall and the **Pindo palm** (*Butia capitata*) which grows 10 to 20 feet tall, still takes up very little space in the landscape. Both of these palms are highly drought and salt tolerant.

This listing should give you a variety of choices for those smaller lots that needs some tree height that will not over power the rest of the landscape and your house. For additional information of trees and palms, please contact the Horticulture Help Line at 582-2110, Tuesday through Thursday from 9 a.m. – 12 N and 1 to 4 p.m. Or, you can visit the University of Florida/ IFAS web site on trees at: <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/selection.html>

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