

Flowers that Bridge the Seasons 🌱 Shrubs for Small Spaces

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# Horticulture

Peacock Mix Cream  
Greigii tulip

Yellow archangel  
dead-nettle

## PERFECT PAIRINGS

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Quick & Easy Crops  
for Early Spring

# Tree Love

Chelsi Abbott of the Davey Institute shares tree-care tasks for early spring



## CREDENTIALS

**Chelsi Abbott**, a Technical Advisor at the Davey Institute, holds degrees in plant pathology and biological sciences. **The Davey Institute** is the scientific headquarters of the Davey Tree Expert Company, whose field crews tend residential and commercial properties across North America. Scientists like Chelsi support Davey's vast network of tree workers through research, technical support and educational offerings. Learn more about Davey at <http://www.davey.com>.

**GIVEN HER MASTER'S DEGREE** in plant pathology, you may think Chelsi Abbott, a Technical Advisor at the Davey Institute, is mostly concerned with how trees die. In speaking with her, it quickly becomes clear that she's happy talking about steps we can take to help trees live—and thrive. This can begin at the earliest start of spring, when it's time to greet our awakening garden and landscape trees.

"Spring cleaning really applies outdoors as much as indoors," Chelsi says. That means stepping outside "with a keen eye" to assess our woody plants and address routine maintenance, she explains. She recommends looking not just for the obvious—that is, winter-damaged branches—but also searching closely to determine trees' and shrubs' health. A good clue comes with leafing out. Chelsi says, "If something's not leafing out, or (leafing out) is spotty, that could be stress, and it's best to get ahead of it."

If a visual inspection suggests a tree is stressed, a few simple spring chores can nip further problems in the bud, so to speak. Chelsi says there's a deep relationship between trees and the soil in which they grow, so if we want our trees to thrive we must make sure the soil is thriving first.

"As trees are coming out of dormancy, soil microbes are coming out of dormancy too," she says, "and it is time to feed the microbiome." This

can be accomplished very easily by applying a fresh layer of compost and/or organic mulch. As for feeding the trees themselves, she highlights the importance of using a slow-release fertilizer, so that nutrients remain available throughout the growing season. And she makes a special note for evergreen conifers in early spring: "Conifers from the dry lands—the spruces—especially need water as they wake up." These will show their stress through browning needles.

Once existing garden trees have been assessed and assisted in early spring, what's left to do? Plant more!

"Spring and fall are both good times to plant trees," Chelsi says. As a tree lover in a big country, it's hard for her to narrow down a must-plant list (though she did oblige; see the "Plant these!" sidebar opposite). Easier is providing universal guidelines for choosing your own trees.

"Natives are always good," she says, "because they'll be hardy to your conditions." However, the best advice she can give is to pick something that fits both the climate and the space.

"That means no sycamore that's going to grow into those power lines, or no Japanese maple where it will be exposed to drying winds," she says. "It really is true: right plant, right place." ❧

MEGHAN SHINN is *Horticulture's* editor.

## PLANT THESE!

It's never easy for a plant lover to play favorites, but when asked to recommend just a few trees for home landscapes, Chelsi Abbott obliged with the following. She pointed out that the first three would be appropriate for northern gardens, while the last (baldcypress) is a good choice for the South:

### << American hornbeam

(*Carpinus caroliniana*; USDA Zones 3-9)

Native to woods, streambanks and flood plains throughout eastern North America, American hornbeam should appeal to gardeners with its adaptability, shade tolerance and small size. An understory tree from the birch family, it tops out between 20 and 35 feet, and while it prefers the shade it can take sun with consistent moisture. Its ornamental appeal comes from its smooth gray bark, fiery fall foliage and the fluting that develops on trunks and branches of mature specimens (inspiring another name, musclemwood). Chelsi notes this tree "is not planted too much, and I like the less common."

### Kentucky coffeetree >>

(*Gymnocladus dioica*; Zones 3-8)

Despite being a native of the Great Lakes, Great Plains, Upper South and western Mid-Atlantic, this unique tree carries a tropical feel thanks to its giant twice-compound leaves. Chelsi cites those leaves as well as its hardiness and scaly, dark brown bark when recommending this tree, but notes it's a slow grower. It can reach 75 to 100 feet tall and its lacy leaves provide filtered sun. (This adaptable and distinctive tree was also cited as a favorite by staff at the Utah State University Botanical Center; see page 26.)

### << Eastern redbud

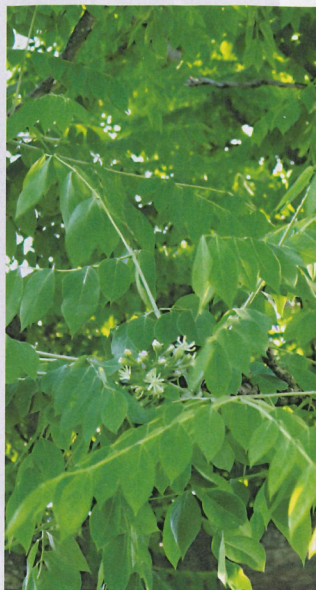
(*Cercis canadensis*; Zones 4-8)

A bit more familiar in gardens—owing to its small stature and vivid spring flowers—redbud makes Chelsi's list because of its burst of seasonal color. The bright pink blossoms occur prior to the tree leafing out. When spring rains darken the tree's bark, the flower color *really* pops, Chelsi points out. A native of woods and streambanks from southern New England to Florida and west into the Plains, eastern redbud takes sun or shade and remains smaller than 30 feet. A couple of western counterparts share its best features.

### Baldcypress >>

(*Taxodium distichum*; Zones 4-10)

Bright orange fall foliage brings baldcypress high on Chelsi's list of beloved trees. She mentions it seems like it shouldn't lose its leaves for the winter, since they're needles and this is a conifer, but indeed it's a deciduous conifer. Hailing from the Southeast's swamplands, baldcypress takes wet soil and poor drainage in stride, though it can also adapt to dry conditions. Because its roots are accustomed to a lack of air, it is a good candidate for parking-lot plantings. Reaching 50 to 75 feet tall, this king of the swamp likes full sun.—MS



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