Great Small Trees for Houston



o celebrate the Garden Club of America's Centennial in 2013, The Garden Club of Houston has created a list of *Great Small Trees for Houston*.

Our city sits at the convergence of several major ecosystems, and our climate encourages the healthy growth of an extraordinary variety of plants, especially trees. Over the years, the Garden Club of Houston has researched an untold number of trees. Our recommended trees have been sold at our popular Bulb & Plant Mart, and more importantly, have been grown in members' gardens. Our collective experience is reflected in *Great Small Trees for Houston*. It is our hope that this list will be useful not only to public entities who build parks and trails, but also to developers, civic associations, growers, and any citizens interested in making our public spaces and private gardens more economical, sustainable, and beautiful.

The *Great Small Trees* were selected based on three criteria:

- native to our area and likely to thrive with little maintenance;
- exceptional beauty and the widest possible range of seasonal interest; and
- habitat benefits, particularly for birds.

We chose to focus on the small trees that are often missing from our public spaces and to emphasize trees that are typically commercially available. To be practical in a public space or a private garden, a tree must require little maintenance and thus be inexpensive over the longer term. Houston, a bird watcher's paradise, is on a major flyway, so plantings must provide shelter and food for birds if we are to sustain this key community characteristic. The best way to achieve all these goals is to use native or adaptive plants found in our general region.

Most importantly, these trees are beautiful. They can bring extraordinary variety and charm to our landscapes.

The *Great Small Trees* offer a remarkable mix of ornamental interest from early spring through fall.

Selection of Small Trees

Anacahuita — Texas Wild Olive Cordia boissieri

American Holly Ilex opaca

Chalk Maple

Acer levcoderme

Eastern Redbud

Cercis canadensis

Ironwood *Carpinus caroliniana*

Mexican Plum *Prunus mexicana*

Native Fringe Tree Chionanthus virginicus Parsley Hawthorn Crataegus marshallii

Possum-Haw Ilex deciduas

Rusty Blackhaw Viburnum Viburnum rufidulum

Southern Wax Myrtle Myrica cerifera

Sweet Bay Magnolia Magnolia virginiana

Two-wing Silver Bell Halesia diptera

Yaupon Holly *llex vomitoria*



Anacahuita — Texas Wild Olive Cordia boissieri **Light:** full sun to partial shade **Soil:** sands, loams, and clays

Moisture: well drained, drought tolerant once

established

Bayou Site: top bank

Growth Habit: persistent to evergreen, fast, sensitive to cold — will freeze to roots below 20

degrees, plant in protected area

Flower: showy 2 inch white flowers with yellow throat, will flower all year long with enough water

Fruit: drupes, white turning to purple Size: 12 to 24 ft. tall, 25 ft. wide Form: rounded crown with short trunk

Special Interest: fruit enjoyed by birds and small mammals



Light: full sun to partial shade Soil: sands, loam, acid soils Moisture: well drained Bayou Site: top bank

Growth Habit: evergreen, slow growing, long

lived

Flower: inconspicuous

Fruit: red berries on female, need male tree

nearby for pollination

Size: 15 to 35 ft., occasionally to 60 ft.

Form: triangular crown that broadens with age

Special Interest: good screening plant, berries enjoyed by many birds and small mammals, larval host plant for butterfly, excellent nesting tree for birds



Light: partial sun

Moisture: dry, will need supplemental water in

severe drought

Soil: rich loam, needs good drainage

Bayou Site: upper slope

Growth Habit: deciduous, fast, rounded crown,

whitish bark

Flower: small in April

Fruit: wings 3/4 inches long

Size: 12 to 20 ft.



Eastern Redbud Cercis canadensis

Light: sun to part shade

Soil: sands, loams and clay

Moisture: well drained, moderate moisture, will need

supplemental water during severe drought

Bayou site: top bank

Growth Habit: deciduous, fast growth

Flower: March — pink flowers about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long, in clusters along branches before leaves appear

Fruit: seed pods Size: 10 to 20 ft.

Form: small tree, spreading, flat or slightly rounded crown, usually single trunk
Special Interest: one of our prettiest flowering trees; leaves are source of
food for butterfly larvae; flowers are nectar source for butterflies, moths, and

bees; seeds are eaten by birds



Ironwood Carpinus caroliniana

Light: sun to partial shade

Soil: loam, clay

Moisture: well drained

Bayou Site: upper slope, top bank
Growth Habit: deciduous, slow growing

Flower: male and female flowers form in fall, persist

through winter, and open in spring Fruit: nutlets in 2 inch clusters
Size: 15 — 30 ft., 20-25 ft. wide

Form: open crown with drooping thin branches

Special Interest: yellow, orange, and red fall color; heartwood is very strong, once used by Indians for bows; flowers and seeds enjoyed by many birds; also called American Hornbeam or Musclewood due to smooth, sinewy trunk,



Mexican Plum Prunus mexicana

Light: full sun to partial shade

Soil: sandy, loam, clay

Moisture: dry to moist, well drained, drought tolerant,

tough tree

Bayou Site: slopes or top bank

Growth Habit: deciduous, moderate to fast growth

in right location

Flower: fragrant, showy white flowers before leaves

appear

Fruit: small round fruit, green turns purple

Size: 15 to 30 ft. tall to 25 ft. wide

Form: single trunk, blue-gray bark with dark horizontal striations, broad crown Special Interest: fruit enjoyed by birds and mammals; larval host for Tiger Swallowtail butterfly and Cecropia moth larvae; fragrant flowers attract bees and butterflies

and bonerines



Chionanthus

virginicus

Light: sun to partial shade, prefers dappled shade Moisture: prefers moist site but is adaptable, will need supplemental water during severe drought Soil: moist, fertile, acid soil, sandy loam

Bayou site: along upper slope or top bank

Growth Habit: deciduous

Flower: March - fragrant, 5-10 inch white panicles,

drooping in clusters

Fruit: August - October on female plants, dark blue to purple drupes

Size: 15 to 20 ft.

Form: slender trunk or often multi-trunked, with

irregular, rounded crown

Special Interest: fruit loved by birds; also known as Grancy Gray Beard



Parsley Hawthorne Crataegus marshallii **Light:** sun to partial shade, flowers better with more

Soil: sands, loam, clays

Moisture: well drained but will tolerate seasonal poor drainage, drought tolerant once established

Bayou Site: lower slope, or top bank

Growth Habit: slow but long lived, deciduous

Flower: 1 inch white flowers, showy

Fruit: small red haws throughout winter, plant more

than one tree for better fruiting Size: 15 to 30 ft. tall, 25 ft. wide

Form: wide-spreading, slender branches and broad, irregular, open crown with

parsley like leaves, some branches have thorns

Special Interest: birds enjoy the fruit in the winter; attracts butterflies; the thorny branches help protect nesting birds from predators.



Possum Haw Ilex deciduas Light: shade, will fruit best in partial shade to sun Soil: adaptable, sands, loams and clays Moisture: well drained, seasonal poor drainage tolerated, drought tolerant

Bayou Site: top bank or slopes Growth Habit: moderate, deciduous Flower: small white flowers in spring

Fruit: bright red-orange drupes on female plants that persists into the winter, females need a male

pollinator for good fruit set

Size: 8 to 20 ft.

Form: loose; rounded, many horizontal and ascending branches

Special Interest: abundant red berries on bare branches in winter are a show

stopper; fruits are eaten by birds and small mammals; good nest tree



Rusty Blackhaw Viburnum Viburnum Light: partial shade to full sun

Soil: sand, loam and clay, well drained

Moisture: drought tolerant

Bayou Site: upper slope of top bank

Growth Habit: deciduous, slow growing

Flower: white flower clusters 4 inches wide in spring

Fruit: blue/black drupes ½ inch long in fall
Size: 10 to 30 ft. tall depending on environment, can

get to 35 ft. wide

Form: shrub for a long time, becomes a tree, single

trunk with broad crown

Special Interest: fruit loved by many birds and mammals; flowers attract butterflies and bees; leaves eaten by butterfly larvae; fall color; glossy leathery leaves. This can be difficult to start, but it is a favorite of many of our experts. Good drainage is key.



Southern Wax Myrtle Myrica cerifera

Light: full sun to partial shade Soil: loam, clay, adaptable

Moisture: will tolerate poor drainage, drought

tolerant once established **Bayou Site:** slopes, top bank

Growth Habit: evergreen, fast growing

Flower: inconspicuous
Fruit: pale bluish berries

Size: 10 to 20 ft. tall, 10 to 15 ft. wide Form: large shrub or small multi-trunked tree

Special Interest: aromatic leaves; natural suckering helps with erosion control; dense growth is excellent

nesting for birds; over 40 species of birds enjoy the fruit; can be used as an

attractive tall screen or as a specimen tree



Sweet Bay Magnolia Magnolia Light: full sun to part shade

Soil: sands, loams, clay, acid soils preferred

Moisture: moist soils preferred, drought tolerant once

established

Bayou Site: slopes, top bank

Growth Habit: semi-evergreen, moderate to fast if

conditions are right

Flower: 3 inch white blooms in spring

Fruit: 2 inch cones in fall

Size: 20 to 40 ft., sometimes 80 ft. tall and 60 ft. wide

Form: narrow crown

Special Interest: fragrant small flowers; seeds for wildlife; easily identified by the white underside of the leaves; a good tree for a wet spot in your yard



Two-wing Silver Bell Light: shade to sun, blooms best in sun Soil: acid soil, loam, well drained

Moisture: moist, will need supplemental water during

severe drought

Bayou Site: top bank, upper slope, edge of woods Growth Habit: moderate to fast, deciduous Flower: 1 inch bell shaped flowers in spring Fruit: 2 inch dangling fruit with two wings

Size: 30 ft.

Form: small round crown, brittle branches

Special Interest: pretty yellow fall color, squirrels and other mammals eat fruit, plant in fall, pick the right location and soil for this plant and you will be rewarded



Yaupon Holly Ilex vomitoria **Light:** full sun to shade **Soil:** sands, loam, clay

Moisture: well drained, tolerates seasonal poor

drainage, drought tolerant

Bayou Site: top banks or slopes

Growth Habit: fast, evergreen

Flower: tiny white flowers in spring

Fruit: red drupes on female trees fall and winter, need

male and female to have berries

Size: 12 to 25 ft.

Form: rounded crown, often pruned into hedges

Special Interest: fruit great value to birds and mammals; leaves are butterfly

larval food; good nesting site for birds; very adaptable tree



of Houston, Trees for Houston and others to create demonstration plantings of *Great Small Trees* along Houston's signature waterway, Buffalo Bayou, beginning in 2009 and continuing through the Garden Club of America's Centennial in 2013. The initial plantings will be clustered in selected locations from Shepherd Drive to Sabine Street, which represents the most photographed entrance to the City. This much-loved green space is not currently native but is the result of dramatic reshaping of the bayou by the Army Corps of Engineers. Planting *Great Small Trees* in this location will help restore Buffalo Bayou to its historic environmental context and function. We invite you to join us in this effort.

Please go to www.buffalobayou.org or www.gchouston.org to learn more!



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Acknowledgments

e could not complete this project without the active support, involvement and encouragement of the Buffalo Bayou Partnership (BBP), the City of Houston through the Houston Parks & Recreation Department, and Trees for Houston, who are active partners with us in creating demonstration plantings along the bayou. Special acknowledgement is due to Anne Olson, BBP President, and to Scott Barnes, BBP Conservation Director. Finally, Johnny Steele, Kevin Shanley and McDugald Steele Associates have contributed pro bono design and consultation services to the demonstration plantings. These recognized experts in gardens, trees, and bayous have been invaluable — thank you! We are also are grateful to Sterling Associates for the brochure design.

The Garden Club of Houston is also indebted to these experts who have contributed to the creation of *Great Small Trees* by offering comments and recommendations:

Linda Knowles , Glenn Olsen / Houston Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas

Chris LaChance / Texas AgriLife Extension

Mickey Merritt / Texas Forest Service

Kevin Shanley / SWA Group and The Bayou Preservation Association

Winnie Burkett, Caroline Callery, Flo Hannah / Houston Audubon

Dee Howell, T.J. Marks / Houston Parks and Recreation Department

Diana Foss / Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

John Watson / Harris County Flood Control District

Will Fleming / Fleming Landscaping Company

Brad Hendricks / City of Houston Urban Forestry

Margie Jenke / Image Seekers, Galveston County Master Gardeners

Johnny Steele / The New Nursery

Resources and References:

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The Bayou Planting Guide by Mark Bowen

Texas Trees, A Friendly Guide by Paul W. Cox & Patty Leslie
Texas Wildscapes, Gardening for Wildlife by Noreen Damude & Kelly
Conrad Bender

Trees for Southern Landscapes by William D. Adams
Trees of Texas, An Easy Guide to Leaf Identification by Carmine Stahl &
Ria McElvaney

Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of the Southwest by Robert A. Vines