

## Clay Soils

The local soil here in the Vale of Evesham often referred to as 'Vale clay' can be extremely heavy, so we're frequently asked if a plant will grow on heavy clay. Here are plants we've found are happy on clay, even on Vale clay. We've indicated where pH is important as soils come in a range of acidities from the very acid to the very alkaline.

### Evergreen Trees

*Eucalyptus globulus* and *E. gunnii* – the Blue Gum and the Cider Gum both tolerate clay soils but require shelter.

*Taxus baccata* – the native Yew is tolerant of a range of soils including clay and prefers neutral to alkaline soils.

### Deciduous Trees

*Acer platanoides* – the Norway Maple – and its cultivars such as *A. platanoides* 'Crimson King' and *A. platanoides* 'Drummondii', the Harlequin Maple

*Amelanchier lamarckii* – we love this tree with its white flowers opening against fresh bronze leaves in spring, green leaves over summer and rich red autumn colour. Doesn't thrive on poor or alkaline soils.

*Carpinus betulus* – the Hornbeam – in appearance not unlike *Fagus sylvatica* (the Beech) – but much happier than the Beech on clay. We particularly like *C. betulus* 'Pyramidalis' with its golden foliage and compact, upright, very formal habit, which is an excellent tree for poor planting conditions.

*Cercis canadensis* – we love this group of trees – in mid-spring the flowers are borne in profusion along bare branches before the heart-shaped leaves emerge. In *C.* 'Forest Pansy' the purple leaves turn deep yellow in autumn and the smaller *C.* 'Avondale' (height and spread 3m) has showy magenta flowers which even emerge from the main stem.

*Crataegus laevigata* – the Midland Hawthorn - thrives on heavy clay. Our favourite is the red-flowered *C. laevigata* 'Paul's Scarlet'.

*Juglans regia* – the Common Walnut is happy on clay in an open, sunny site provided the soil is not soaking wet or dry.

*Malus* – the Crab Apples make wonderful ornamental trees. *M.* 'Red Sentinel' holds onto its small, glossy, red fruit well into the autumn, attracting birds to the garden and *M.* 'Evereste' acts as a good pollinator for dessert and cooking apples

*Quercus robur* – the English Oak

*Sorbus aucuparia* – the Rowan or Mountain Ash – white flowers in spring, divided green leaves turning bright red and orange in autumn. Prefers neutral to acid soils.

*Sorbus cashmiriana* – the Kashmir Rowan – a beautiful Rowan, ideal for a smaller garden, whose pinky-white berries hang on well into the winter as they're a bit too large for birds to eat – good autumn leaf colour. Prefers neutral to acid soils.

*Sorbus* 'Eastern Promise' – a pink-berried Rowan whose green leaves turn purple then fiery red in autumn. Prefers neutral to acid soils.

## **Deciduous trees which need waterlogged sites and so love heavy clay**

*Metasequoia glyptostroboides* – the Dawn Redwood – a deciduous conifer ‘found’ in China in 1944. The delicate, feathery leaves turn orange before falling in autumn.

*Taxodium distichum* – the Swamp Cypress from the Southern USA. Another deciduous conifer and very like the Dawn Redwood, its leaves turn russet-brown in the autumn. It produces aerial roots if grown in water.

## **Evergreen Shrubs**

*Aucuba japonica* – the Spotted Laurel is an unfussy shrub – slow-growing, tolerant of a wide range of soils, happy in the sun where its yellow spots give the best colour, and contented in dry shade where it cheers up dark corners and hedge-bottoms. It can be grown as a hedge itself and either clipped to shape or left to grow more loosely.

Berberis – an unfussy range of shrubs, some of which such as *B. darwinii* are evergreen. All have spines.

*Camellia japonica* has glossy, dark leaves which make an excellent evergreen background to other plants all year once its glorious spring flowers are over. Its ideal pH is between 5.5 and 6.5 so on other soils generously mulch annually with ericaceous compost

*Camellia sasquana* – the autumn-flowering Camellia may produce a smaller, less showy flower than the spring-flowering variety, but it makes up for this in the abundance and length of its flowering at a time of year (mid-autumn to mid-winter) when flowering shrubs are in short supply. Its flowers are also less likely to be damaged by frost than those of the spring-flowering *C. japonica*. Again, it prefers acid soil, so on other soils generously mulch annually with ericaceous compost

*Choisya ternata* – the Mexican Orange-Blossom – a useful evergreen shrub with white flowers in spring, often repeated in autumn

*Euonymus japonicus* – the Japanese Spindle has broad, creamy-white margins to its mid-green leaves. Young leaves open bright yellow.

*Mahonia x media* ‘Charity’ – a tall evergreen shrub which produces long, upright spikes of yellow flowers over winter

*Skimmia japonica* – a valuable plant because its red berries last all autumn winter, often until the flowers appear the following spring. Prefers neutral to acid soil, but is happy on heavy clay. Plant both male and female plants for the best display of berries.

The Cotoneasters – a useful, unfussy group of plants which grow happily on clay and evergreen in all but the hardest winters. *C. ‘Coral Beauty’* has good berry colour.

## **Deciduous Shrubs**

*Chaenomeles* – the Quince – grown for spring flowers and edible fruit. Flower colour ranges from white through pinks to pinky-apricots. Good against a sunny wall.

*Cornus alba* – the red-stemmed Dogwood – we particularly like *C. alba* ‘Red Selection’ whose vivid red stems look great reflected in water over winter

*Cornus sanguinea* ‘Midwinter Fire’ with its flame-coloured stems is another favourite

*Corylus avellana* – the Hazel or Cob Nut, which produces edible nuts, is fine grown on heavy clay. It prefers acidic soil, but is unfussy.

Syringa – the Lilac – thrives on clay and produces showy flowers in late spring and early summer. Prefers neutral to alkaline soils.

Weigela – undemanding shrubs, some with variegated foliage, and white, pink or red summer flowers – prefer neutral to alkaline soils

Roses thrive on clay soils if given copious amounts of organic mulch

*Sambucus nigra*, including *S. nigra* 'Black Lace' and *S. nigra* 'Black Beauty' with their showy, divided, purple-black foliage and large heads of pink flowers are good at the back of the border. They're unfussy, cope with waterlogged soils and are good on alkaline soils.

## **Climbers**

*Clematis armandii* (white flowers) and *C. armandii* 'Apple Blossom' (pint flowers) – the Evergreen Clematis – are both happy on clay

*Euonymus fortunei* 'Silver Queen' – doesn't climb, but can be trained against a wall in full or partial sun

*Hydrangea petiolaris* – the climbing Hydrangea – good in north-facing situations

*Lonicera periclymenum* 'Belgica' – this fragrant Honeysuckle is unfussy, enjoying heavy clay and light sandy soil though it prefers a neutral to alkaline soil

*Pyracantha* – Firethorn – needs to be trained against a wall or fence using wire and vine eyes. A useful plant that's evergreen in all but the hardest winters, has white flowers in spring and colourful berries in the autumn which are enjoyed by birds

*Wisteria sinensis* (the Chinese Wisteria) and *Wisteria floribunda* (the Japanese Wisteria) – for us are the jewels of the botanical world – easy to grow, extremely long-lived, vigorous and magnificent when in flower. In late spring all varieties produce colourful cascades of fragrant flowers in whites, pinks and blues. We adore *W. floribunda* 'Black Dragon' with its intensely dark flowers and the white-flowered *W. floribunda* 'Shiro-kapitan Fuji' with its long, generous racemes. We offer them trained into arches, roofs and umbrellas and as straightforward plants. *Wisteria sinensis* does not flourish on alkaline soils.