

Neutral to Alkaline Soils

Gardening on alkaline soils can be as challenging as gardening on acid soils, though we hear less about it. Below we've suggested some of our favourite trees and shrubs for neutral to alkaline soils.

Evergreen Trees

Abies nordmanniana – the Nordman Fir and *Abies concolor* 'Candicans' – the White Fir – tolerate alkaline soils.

Cedars, including *Cedrus libani* (the Cedar of Lebanon), *Cedrus atlantica* (the Atlas Cedar) and *Cedrus deodara* (the Deodar Cedar) are unfussy about soils and are happy on chalky-alkaline soils.

Quercus ilex – the Holm Oak is tolerant of a range of soils, but thrives on shallow chalk

Taxus baccata – the native Yew is tolerant of a range of soils, but thrives on chalk

Deciduous Trees

Some of the Japanese Acers prefer alkaline conditions, among them *Acer palmatum* 'Sango-kaku' – the Coral-Bark Maple with its glorious red stems. The green-leaved *Acer palmatum* 'Seiryu' – the Emerald Lace Acer – gives better autumn colour on acid soils, but tolerates alkaline conditions.

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

Carpinus betulus – the Hornbeam – is not unlike the Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) in appearance, but is much happier on clay than the beech.

Cercis squilistrum (Judas Tree) – prefers sandy soils, tolerates a higher pH, but also performs well in neutral to slightly acidic soil. The pinky-magenta flowers appear on the bare branches in spring and are followed by shapely blue-green leaves which open bronze and turn yellow in autumn.

Crataegus – the Hawthorn – both *Crataegus mongyna* and *C. laevigata* (the Midland Hawthorn), though *C. laevigata* does better on heavy clay. Our favourite is the red-flowered *C. laevigata* 'Paul's Scarlet'.

Fagus sylvatica 'Aspenifolia' with its delicately cut leaves is our favourite Beech, but all do well on alkaline soils.

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

Morus nigra – the Mulberry – we offer this as an ornamental roof as well as a tree. Roofs are ideal for casting shade on seating areas.

Prunus avium and *Prunus sargentii* – both lovely Flowering Cherries and excellent autumn colour

Pyrus 'Chanticleer' – a fantastic pear for autumn colour which makes a tall, majestic tree.

Robinia pseudoacacia 'Frisia' – the golden-leaved False Acacia which gives good autumn colour.

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 darwinii – the spiny, yellow-flowering, evergreen Barberry

Buxus sempervirens – the Box – tolerates a wide range of soil pH, including very alkaline soils

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

Euonymus fortunei varieties, such as *E. fortunei* ‘Silver Queen’ whose white and green variegated leaves become tinged with pink in winter are at home on alkaline soils.

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

Rosmarinus officinale – the Rosemary

Viburnum davidii – is happy on a wide range of soil acidities and particularly well-suited to chalk, though it hates very wet soils. Large, deeply-veined, mid-green leaves. Male and female flowers are on separate plants and female plants bear metallic-blue berries when grown near a male plant

Viburnum tinus – with its long period of interest – the pink buds appear in autumn and open to white flowers over winter. We offer it as a bush or as half-standard topiary.

Deciduous Shrubs

Corylus avellana – the Hazel or Cob Nut, which produces edible nuts, grows on a wide range of soils including chalky/alkaline ones

The unfussy Cotoneasters all tolerate even very alkaline soils

Euonymus alatus – the Burning Bush gets its common name from its brilliant red autumn colour and grows well on alkaline soil.

We were delighted to discover that the white-flowered *Magnolia stellata* ‘Royal Star’ not only tolerates alkaline soil if mulched well each spring, but also begins flowering in April, often escaping frost damage. It also has golden autumn colour.

Sambucus nigra, including *S. nigra* ‘Black Lace’ and *S. nigra* ‘Black Beauty’ boasts showy, divided, purple-black foliage and large heads of pink flowers. It is unfussy, does well on chalk and is good at the back of the border

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

Climbers

Hydrangea petolaris – the climbing Hydrangea, which is happy in north-facing situations – unfussy and happy on alkaline soils.

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

Wisteria floribunda (the Japanese Wisteria) – for us the Wisterias 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 also offer them trained into arches, roofs and umbrellas. *Wisteria sinensis* (the Chinese Wisteria) does not flourish on alkaline soils.

