

## ASPECTS OF A COTTAGE GARDEN

### Woody Plants for Structure

Even a small cottage garden requires some shrubs and/or trees if the desirable informal look with varied shapes and levels is to be achieved. However, it is obviously necessary to proceed with caution and to research carefully, since not only trees but many common shrubs can become huge in a relatively short time. Where space is tight, it makes sense to choose woody plants which give height without too much width, such as bladder senna (*Colutea arborescens*), myrtle, flowering currant, pillar-style fruit trees and flowering cherries, eucryphia and silver birch (though this is a tall tree). It is worth considering having an informal hedge instead of a fence as this will give a shrubby backdrop, freeing border space for herbaceous plants. If you can't resist large shrubs, restrict the quantity to a number you know you will be able to prune.



Where there is plenty of space, it is still necessary to give thought to the ultimate sizes of woody plants and how much shade they will give. Big specimen trees are best left to the gardens of stately homes, where they can be allowed to shade a large area where nothing much grows. The best trees for cottage gardens are undoubtedly fruit trees, being useful as well as beautiful, and these traditionally need not be restricted to any particular area; but if you want to grow ornamental trees as well, apples and pears and some other fruits are amenable to being strictly pruned and grown on walls and fences or as free-standing espaliers (on wires), when they will do duty as an ornamental garden divider. Fruit trees can be obtained on very dwarfing rootstocks, which are ideal for growing in containers and as cordons on a fence, but in the open ground a slightly larger tree fits better with the cottage garden style. Take care to choose varieties which are self-fertile or which pollinate each other (crab apples will often pollinate other apples).

The most suitable ornamental trees are smallish flowering trees such as laburnum, double hawthorn, crab apples, flowering cherries (some of which are far from small, so choose varieties with care), witch hazel, ameliancher *etc.* Some have ornamental fruit or autumn colour to offer as well. Silver birch (*Betula pendula*) and other small-leaved trees cast a less dense shade; birch eventually becomes very large (and sheds seeds and twigs, to some people's annoyance!) but is not too spreading, and planting a small group close together will help to restrict growth.

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Big shrubs which can be pruned hard include buddleia, escallonia, pyracantha, some hebes, cornus and flowering currant (*Ribes*). Small shrubs which don't need much pruning include smaller hebes, some euonymus, some cistus, daphne (not all but several varieties), lavender and small azaleas. Many others fall somewhere in between. Shrub roses and, if possible, ramblers are clearly a must for any cottage garden, but ramblers do tend to be immense and some shrub roses are also much too big for small gardens. It is well worth considering the modern 'English' roses, which have old-fashioned flowers and shrub rose character but are often a manageable size; many of them also flower continuously or repeat well. However, they are not all as strong and vigorous as they might be and it is wise to read up about them first and not just choose by colour. Similarly, a little research should turn up a rambling or climbing rose or two that will be suitable for your garden.