

# greenPROFIT

## Features

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## Fitting In

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There are many situations in the garden and landscape where space is an issue. Many urban gardens have a small footprint, making it essential to maximize every square foot of the space for both beauty and productivity. This is also true for many retirement community gardens, as well as rooftop gardens, courtyard spaces and narrow side yards.

However, there are many trees and shrubs that are either narrow or fastigate in nature, and there are diminutive selections as well. These selections not only provide height, texture and seasonal interest without overwhelming a small area, but they also create layers and focal points that make the space feel intentional and dynamic. Thoughtful plant choices like these allow even the smallest gardens to feel abundant and well-designed year-round.

### **Upright or Fastigate Trees**

While most maples can get relatively large and broad spreading, there are several with very upright habits. The paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*) is grown for its year-round coppery peeling bark and exceptional orange, yellow and red fall colors. Copper Rocket is hardy to USDA Zone 5 with an upright columnar habit reaching 25-ft. tall with a spread of only 12 ft.

One of the best trees for fall color is the red maple (*Acer rubrum*). As the name would suggest, most red maples have a blazing, fire-engine red fall color. Armstrong Gold is noted for its golden fall color and has a very upright habit, reaching only 40-ft. tall and a spread of 12 ft. at maturity.

In recent years, hornbeam or musclewood (*Carpinus caroliniana*) has been gaining in popularity due to its multiple ecological functions. This relatively small ornamental native tree has great fall color and is adaptable as a street tree in urban areas, but can also withstand flooding and an inundation of water. Rising Fire has bright golden-yellow fall color and only reaches 30-ft. tall with a spread of 15 ft. at maturity.

### **Narrow Evergreens**

While upright deciduous trees are key for the small-space garden, the same can be said for evergreens with a narrow form. *Ilex crenata* Ascent is a new introduction of the Japanese holly. Japanese hollies serve a multitude of purposes in the garden. They can be used for hedging or as an

evergreen accent. Ascent only reaches 6-ft. tall with a spread of 3 ft. Like other Japanese hollies, they're noted for their dark green, glossy leaves. Straight & Narrow is another selection that's very upright and fastigate.

The Eastern red cedar is a native, coniferous evergreen that's valued for both its hardiness and fruit production for native birds. Taylor is an extremely fastigate selection. It can be used as a strong architectural feature in the garden.

Most Southern magnolia cultivars tower in the garden. Teddy Bear is much more compact in its habitat. It's characterized by dark, glossy leaves with an attractive brown indumentum on the undersides of the leaves.

### Small Flowering Shrubs

There are many great small flowering shrubs that can be used in masses or individually to bring ornaments to the garden. The abelias are excellent for an abundance of flowers during the summer and are a magnet for butterflies. Pink Perfection is only 3-ft. tall with an equal spread. The foliage emerges as a peach color and turns to yellow. The flowers are white with a pink sepal that persists and adds interest once flowering has finished.

The black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) is a multi-season native shrub with white flowers in the spring, black fruits in late summer and vivid red fall color. Low Scape Mound is an introduction that only reaches 3-ft. wide and tall.

### Small Trees

Many Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*) are excellent for the small garden. Shishigashira is very slow-growing and becomes very architectural over time. The leaves are somewhat crinkled and curled, which adds interest. The fall color is a blazing golden color and it will only reach 15-ft. tall at maturity.

A new selection of the Saskatoon serviceberry, *Amelanchier alnifolia* Standing Ovation reaches 15-ft. tall with a spread of only 4 ft. In the spring, it's covered in white flowers as the leaves are emerging. Following flowering, an abundance of edible fruits are borne. The fall color is a dazzling display of orange, yellow and red.



*Aronia melanocarpa* Low Scape Mound

### Small Evergreens

Small evergreen shrubs are invaluable in the garden. They can be used as a single planting or in mass for winter interest. They can also bring architectural qualities to the garden and combine nicely with other plants that have interesting winter stems or winter flowers.

Buxus NewGen Liberty Belle was selected for its resistance to boxwood blight. It has dark green foliage, a mounding habit and, like other boxwoods, is resistant to deer. Distylium Swing Low has a mounding or cascading habit. It only reaches 3-ft. tall and can grow in dry shade. This means it grows well in the Southern states.

These are just a handful of the dozens of excellent trees and shrubs that are perfect in the small garden. Incorporating these carefully chosen plants ensures that even the most compact spaces can be both beautiful and functional year-round. **GP**

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Andrew Bunting is the Vice President of Horticulture for the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS), which uses horticulture to advance the health and well-being of the Greater Philadelphia region. To learn more about PHS, or to become a member and support greening initiatives in over 250 neighborhoods, visit [PHSonline.org](https://www.phsonline.org).