
Gardening in Burgundy - November

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November - A Time for Trees

Some people see the autumn as the time in the garden when plants die, flowers fade and everything becomes bare and dull. But it can be a season of beginnings, because it is the best month to be planting deciduous trees.

Planting deciduous trees when they have no leaves has several advantages. No leaves means that the trees need far less water and so if roots are damaged, or have to be cut back, during planting they have time to recover. And if there is still some residual warmth in the soil the tree may be able to put out new fine roots before the winter cold begins in earnest. This will mean that when the spring comes they are well placed to start growing as soon as conditions permit.

It is also easier to transport bare root trees, so they can be bought mail-order or from a nursery outside the region. Moving a tree in a large pot is one thing but transporting a tree with damp sacking around its roots and the whole plant protected in a paper bag is much easier. It can safely be left for several days, provided it is protected from extremes of heat or cold.

Whenever you plant a tree you look to the future. Sometimes it is tempting to say 'I'll never see it in its prime so why bother?' but if people in the past had taken that attitude we would not have the richness of gardens and woodlands of today. And, although trees do take a long time to grow to their maximum size, there is still a great deal of pleasure to be gained from them when they are young. Looking at a tree which is only 6ft (2m) high is very different to looking at one that towers above you. It is a more intimate view and you find yourself taking time to consider the detail of the tree; the shape of its leaves, the colour of its bark and the form of any flowers and fruits.

So how to choose trees that will succeed in this region? They will have to survive winter temperatures that sometimes drop below -20°C and summer temperatures that can (don't we know it!) rise above 40°C. First, look around and see what other people are growing. Their taste may not be your taste but if, for example, birches are flourishing in their garden it can

be a valuable clue. And then look around at the wild trees growing in the hedgerows and in the woods close to you. Originally the garden behind our house was a field with behind it a mixed wood of oak, birch, holly and spruce. So when we came to choose trees we first added some native birch and oaks. With them we planted red American oaks and two other forms of birch, *Betula papyrifera* and *Betula jacquemontii*.

Planting native trees has the advantage that they often support a wider variety of beneficial insects and should add to the natural cover and food available for birds. So we also planted a mountain ash, a field maple and a wild cherry. But no one can resist the opportunity to extend the range of plants in their garden and over time we have added a walnut, several ornamental cherries, various fruit trees and eight yew trees, which after three years have grown sufficiently for us to begin clipping them into topiary shapes.

We planted very small saplings, mainly because they were cheaper that way, but also because we knew we had time to let them grow. And small trees will always transplant better than larger ones. Larger trees tend to take longer to get started again and smaller ones can catch up over this time. They were planted quite close together (about 5-6m apart) so that they gave each other some protection but we knew that, if they all survived, it would be necessary to thin them. That time has not yet come but it will probably arrive in another five years. And then when we have more shade we will be able to make space for under-planting with shade-loving species. A good garden never stands still it always evolves.

This article has been submitted by Steve and Carol Deakin
