

## Introducing plants and trees into your street

### 1. Plants and shrubs

The introduction of plants is a fantastic way of improving the look of your street. Plants can also act as traffic calming measures either by reducing straight sight lines for drivers or by physically creating a chicane which drivers have to negotiate. In addition designing the planting scheme and maintaining the beds or planters provides a way of getting to know your neighbours.

#### Choosing the areas to be planted

Most streets will not have a suitable green space that you can fill with plants, so you will need to construct or buy planters. Before deciding on a planting scheme, you must decide on the most suitable design of planter for your street. There are many designs to choose from although the location will determine the most appropriate design. Do you want them to be placed in the road to create a pinch point or break up parking spaces, or set back on the pavement?



Agreeing on the design and location of the planters with your community and the Council Highways team may well be a challenging part of the process, and you should be aware that your choices may be limited by a number of factors (see Design section for more detail). You should therefore try to be as flexible with your ideas as possible to avoid disappointment.

## Examples of planting areas directly in the carriageway



Open bottomed, direct planting into carriageway with concrete edge.



Open bottomed, with wooden sleeper edging

Once the location of your planters have been decided and your highways engineer has agreed that they will not restrict the streets access requirements you can start to be creative and find out who is interested in designing and looking after the planting.

### **Involving people**

You may find that several residents have gardening experience and others who want to develop their skills. Community planters are great ways of sharing ideas and best practice whilst providing a space to learn and experiment. You may want to set up an official gardening group for those who are committed to looking after the planting – although it is important that everyone is aware that they can add plants to the planters and do some gardening if they feel like it.

If you want to generate more community interest on your street, you could hold children's bulb planting workshops, competitions, and set up regular maintenance rotas.

## Planting schemes

The type of planting you choose will depend on the interest of the residents. You could leave the design of the planting scheme to your gardening group if you have one or



allocate an enthusiastic individual to come up with ideas. If you need a helping hand you could contact a local gardening group or plant nursery for ideas. If few people are interested then opt for planting plans which requires low maintenance.

Plants and shrubs that thrive in urban areas are often different from those in rural environments. Much of that is to do with maintenance (planters need a lot of watering for example) and vandalism (e.g. shrubs being pulled out, trampled on).

Some useful information sources and handy check lists when considering plantings follow.

## Planting considerations

It is important to choose plants which are happy to grow in the conditions provided, if your planters are to be successful. Some shrubs and plants enjoy a shaded position while others require full sun. Similarly some varieties prefer specific soil types or a very sheltered position away from strong wind. All these points should be considered.

***Style of plant:*** Another consideration is whether your planters are open or closed bottomed, as shrubs and bushes planted directly into the ground will be able to draw more moisture from the soil. If you use a closed bottom variety of planter then you may need to choose bushes or shrubs which are more drought tolerant as they may rely on watering. In general you should try to choose hardy varieties of plants and shrubs which can withstand a street environment and which do not need complex pruning or maintenance.

***Choice of species:*** This will depend on the criteria they need to fulfil i.e.

- Shady position with low maintenance
- Sunny position with low maintenance
- Shady position with high maintenance
- Sunny position with high maintenance

By mixing:

- Native insect loving or scented shrubs and plants
- Winter flowering/ evergreen species
- Hardy perennials
- Early / late summer flowering
- Spring bulbs
- Species with autumn interest

You can create not only colour on your street all year round, but also an environment which will attract wildlife. Some species of plants are particularly attractive to bees and butterflies. Similarly you could also grow edible plants and herbs, turning your planters into productive community gardens! The possibilities are endless. For more details look at the information sources below.

***Structure of scheme:*** Design wise, you should think about how high or large shrubs and plants will be when they reach maturity, then plant accordingly with large shrubs in the middle and lower level plants at the edges. A good rule to follow is to plant small clusters of the same plant in odd numbers. This will create more impact than dotting small single plants. A good way to start choosing the right plants for your street is to see which of the following four categories fits your planter project. This may help if you are a group ensuring everyone is able to research plants no matter how much experience they have.



## **Information sources**

There is a wealth of gardening websites, radio, television shows and books and well as personal knowledge amongst residents. Another good tip if you are unsure about these things is to look and see what grows well in neighbouring gardens and parks. This may indicate soil and weather conditions and guide you as to what will grow well. A visit to a local garden centre or nursery may also provide you with information and you should

always be able to ask for help. As your gardening experience grows so will your creative ideas!

## **2, Trees**

Trees that survive and thrive in an urban environment are very different from trees that survive and thrive out in the country.

Hotter air temperatures, pollution, lack of water due to surrounding hard surfaces, vandalism, scorching from the sun's reflection from car windows and mirrors and so forth, all regularly bombard our urban trees. Unless the trees we choose are naturally able to withstand this onslaught they will not survive.



The best person to speak to about this is an experienced tree officer. Some are qualified, others are experienced, and some are both. You might ask them politely what their background is to understand more what their recommendations are based on. Ask them about using native trees – in some cases they may say it's not possible but check on the reasons for this. There are

several large tree nurseries where you can also go for advice such as Hilliers and Barchams.

### **Top tip**

Trees and plants that are 'native' – have been in the UK since between the last ice age and several hundred years ago – are able to support much greater biodiversity than non-native species. There is also little danger of native species being 'invasive'. There is a limited choice of native species that you can use in urban environments (due to the higher temperatures and impermeable surfacing) but well-informed tree officers will know a great deal about this area and can help you.

There are three types of root specification: 'bare-root', 'root-ball' and 'container grown'.

### **Bare-root**

These are lifted directly from the ground, placed in bags for transportation and then planted. They can be supplied from November to the end of March. Benefits: value for money, light to handle, fast to establish with correct after-care.

## Root-balled

These are lifted with the soil intact around the root system, wrapped in biodegradable hessian and galvanised wire then planted as is. They can be supplied from November to April. Benefits: root system not disturbed once lifted<sup>1</sup>; they are protected from rough handling during planting.

**Container-grown** trees are lifted between November and March and then grown in a container for at least one growing season. They can be supplied all year round.

Benefits: no root loss during lifting; planting can take place 12 months a year

## Approximate height/ girth/ cost

Girth (cm) <sup>2</sup>	Description	Height (m)	Approx. cost
8-10	Standard	2.5 - 3.0	£30, £40, £50
10-12	Select standard	3.0 - 3.5	
12-14	Heavy standard	3.5 - 4.0	
14-16	Extra heavy standard	4.0 - 4.5	£50, £65, £85
16-18	Advanced nursery stock	4.0 - 4.5	
18-20	“	4.5 - 5.0	£150 - £175
20-25	Semi-mature	4.5 - 5.0	
25-30	“	5.5 - 6.0	£250 - £295
30-35	“	6.0 - 6.5	
40-45	Super semi-mature	7.0+	£550 - £700

Only large semi-mature trees have a trunk substantial enough to provide any visual deflection at driver-level; feathered trees (those with small stems/branches growing out

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of the trunk) could provide greater visual deflection as large a tree as the budget will allow should be planted so they are vandal-resistant; smaller trees may need protection in areas where vandalism is a problem

Notes on cost:

The rule of thumb is to multiply the cost of the tree by three which then takes into account transport/installation costs and 1 year's maintenance:

***Total = tree + installation + 1 year's care***

e.g. 10-12cm girth, root-ball = £90 (£30 x 3)

40-45cm girth, container = £2100 (£700 x 3)

In other words, you can get 23 little trees for the same price as 1 extra large one!



## General notes

- ❖ Factors that need to be taken into account when planting a tree include proximity to structures, services, overhanging the carriageway, etc.
- ❖ Fitting trees into narrow spaces is a common problem in urban areas and nurseries are developing suitable varieties of street trees.
- ❖ Your Council tree and highways officers will ensure that the spots you have chosen for trees are suitable – amongst other things they will need to ensure that the tree roots will not damage underground utilities and that the tree is of a suitable shape and size so it does not cause unwanted obstruction. The Council will also construct the pit into which the tree is planted, design the tree surface grille and organise longer term maintenance.