

Street Trees

Sustrans Community Toolkit

Trees can make streets come to life with changing colours, blossom, scent, and by attracting wildlife through berries, bark, fruit, sap and shelter. They can also act as psychological traffic calming to reduce the speed of vehicles along your street.

Street trees create shade and shelter on your street, and can even help shield houses from traffic noise. They can save energy, reduce and control air pollution, reduce the risk of flooding and help reduce high urban temperatures.

There's also evidence to show that the presence of street trees help improve people's mental wellbeing, with significant links between the number of street trees and antidepressant prescriptions.

Choosing locations for your trees

Many streets will not have the width to plant trees into the pavement, in which case you will likely need to look at planting them in the carriageway in build outs, for example in the line of parking bays, or even in freestanding planters (less ideal due to water and growth restrictions).

The species selected for streets these days are chosen to avoid the problems of roots breaking up pavements, finding their ways into cellars, or creating deep shade for the houses. Street tree experts now choose species that are suitable for the location, the desired lifespan, the maintenance required and the conditions under which they will be growing such as urban pollution and potential drought. When you meet to discuss trees, invite your local authority Tree Officer, arboriculturist or landscape architect along to give you advice.

Studies have shown that trees do best when communities care for them themselves, and perhaps more interestingly, that caring for street trees improves community cohesion and leads to more community events and celebrations.

Permission

To install street trees you will need permission from your local authority. When you have locations selected, you will need to consult with your local authority highway team and the parks/open space maintenance teams. The highways team will need to check your location for the presence of (underground and over-ground) utilities, and you may need to select alternative locations if the ones you selected are not possible. It is worth identifying a few locations so they can check multiple locations for utilities at once.

Choosing species and using native trees

Trees and plants that are 'native' (those that 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 good selection 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 decide on some species.

You may want to select trees that provide seasonal colour, blossom, berries, fruit or nuts, or that only grow to a certain size. [Barchams](#) provide helpful advice on tree selection and size for your location. There is also some helpful guidance on tree selection through [Hillier's Design Guide](#)

Root specification

There are three main types of specification, their benefits and constraints are outlined below:

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; they are protected from rough handling during planting.

Container-grown

These 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

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 new 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 want to construct the pit into which the tree is planted (or get one of their contractors to do so), choose the tree surface grille and organise longer term maintenance.

- Most local authorities will be encouraged by communities wanting to take on board some of the maintenance and watering of the trees, to do it 'formally' usually requires an adoption process, something which your local authority will need to advise you about.

Funding

Street trees are not cheap to install, but they are worth it! You may need to fundraise to pay for them, or apply for funding from organisations/funders to cover the cost. The price will need to cover the following:

- Cost of the tree and delivery (the larger you can get the bigger the impact and the better its chances of surviving vandalism, but smaller trees can establish more successfully to the change in situation)
- Cost of digging the tree pit, support stakes, tree grille, and a tree guard (if necessary)
- Cost of your local authority/their framework contractors to install it
- Maintenance during establishment, usually the cost of 1-2 years watering and maintenance by the local authority maintenance team or their contractors. In some cases you may be able to negotiate doing this yourselves, but do note: newly planted trees require a lot of watering and care or they can fail quickly

Links and studies:

Landscape and Urban Planning magazine (2015) Research note: Urban street tree density and antidepressant prescription rates - A cross-sectional study in London, UK (Available online)

Trees for Cities: The benefits of Urban Trees

Forestry Commission: Grant funding and advice

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