



On a grand scale

When it comes to trees, size is all important for specialist nursery Majestic Trees, and bigger is definitely better ▶

PHOTOGRAPHS **JASON INGRAM** WORDS **CINEAD McTERNAN**

Steve McCurdy, owner of Majestic Trees, arrives outside the office of his 19-acre Hertfordshire-based nursery in one of the company's trade-mark golf carts, and strides across the yard to say hello.

His passion for trees is immediately obvious as he enthuses about the size and shape of an impressive cloud-pruned pine that is next to the office entrance. Suggesting a tour around the nursery, which he started in 2001, he's also proud of his business. It's not surprising.

A visual treat whatever the season, the site is bursting with trees - row upon row of all sizes and ages. From 1m (4ft) to a massive 12m (40ft) tall, from 12-14cm girth to a considerable 1m or more, and from four to 150 years old.

Even on a cold, winter's day the nursery is busy. A large *Platanus* (plane) bound for a garden in Derby is being expertly lifted by a forklift truck at one end of the nursery, ready to be taken to the wrapping and loading area; a telehandler creeps through a gushing ford, busy in its efforts to keep the site mud-free despite two days of constant rain; and customers are looking around with Majestic's horticulturally trained staff, who are always on hand to give advice and answer questions.

It's hard to imagine that just eight years ago this nursery didn't exist. The then water-logged site was caught in limbo, waiting for residential planning approval to be granted.

Quick to see the potential of this apparently unpromising patch, Steve secured it in early 2001. While the location was excellent, near London and on the edge of the M25, the boggy, heavy clay soil posed a serious problem. But, in true Majestic Trees style, a solution was soon found. Massive earthworks moved over 75,000 tons of soil to regrade and install drainage and a staggering 4.5 million litre reservoir was created to harvest rain water for irrigation. Three footbridges were built to cross



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP FAR LEFT One of more than 450 varieties in the nursery; a cedar is prepared to be lifted into a lorry; Fern Snowling's expertise at moving large trees makes it look easy; *Liquidambar styraciflua*; Airpots promote excellent fibrous roots for container-grown stock; dispatch manager John Lamkin (left) and head grower Anthony Robinson make sure trees are safe for transit; on the move, passing large pleached specimens. BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT John Lamkin protects a hessian-wrapped root ball with mesh; twisting to fit with a hooked tool; a weeping birch gets the 'Majestic' treatment. RIGHT Paul Evans, stock control manager, measures the stock.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT TREE

Trees instantly change how a garden looks and feels. Even a single specimen makes an impact, either creating a focal point or a full stop to a view. It can also provide shade in summer or add colour interest in autumn. Deciding on the right tree can be overwhelming, but there are a few useful things to consider to help narrow the list.

● **Seasonal sensation or year-round stalwart?** First things first, deciduous or evergreen? Trees that don't drop their leaves are ideal for privacy or as a windbreak throughout the year, but if a blazing autumnal show is all important, you'll have to put up with bare branches in winter. Blossom, beautiful bark or winter berries are also features to consider.

● **Size matters.** Be realistic with the amount of space that is available for a tree. A large specimen with spreading canopy will overpower a tiny garden and block sunlight for other plants. Conversely, smaller varieties can look lost in big gardens, although planting in groups can often be an effective solution.

● **Location, location.** Don't plant trees in close proximity to buildings, patios or steps. Varieties with huge root systems, such as willow, poplar, oak and elm, can cause considerable damage and must be planted up to 40m (130ft) away. Magnolia, laburnum or birch, however, only need a distance of up to 10m (32ft).

● **Go native.** Choosing British trees is a fantastic way to attract plenty of wildlife to visit a garden as they have long been a food source and shelter for a wealth of insects, birds and other animals found in the UK. Varieties found in local areas will also be more suited to the soil and climate of the region and require less after care.

the River Ver, a protected river that runs through the site, improving access to the north side of the nursery. Production and loading areas were created and a wooden chalet-style office constructed. As if this wasn't ambitious enough, Steve oversaw the building of his family home too.

Today there's more construction underway with a newly acquired 6.5 acres that will provide a further growing area and second, large reservoir.

Expanding the nursery is essential as demand for Majestic's trees continues to grow, with the company fulfilling more than 1,300 orders last year all over the UK. While Steve and his team work closely with garden designers, estate managers and developers, private customers are a significant part of the business.

'Trees can be quite far down the list when gardeners are making a new garden or revamping an existing one,' Steve says. 'But the right tree for the right space will transform it, adding structure not to mention introducing seasonal interest and a habitat for wildlife. We aim to take the hassle out of buying trees, so gardeners feel more confident to put them at the top of their lists.'

Steve's team really shine when it comes to working with big trees, whether it's suggesting the best variety or working out the logistics of delivering a 12m (40ft) tree weighing eight tons.

Nonetheless, even with careful planning, things still take the team by surprise. 'For the last couple of years, we've suffered with the wet summers,' says Steve. 'Ground conditions have been so soft, we were having to manually board out enormous stretches of ground to

protect lawns from damage by our heavy machinery. It was expensive, time consuming and, frankly, very demoralising.'

Not to be defeated, Steve found a tracked dumper that creates the lightest amount of ground pressure - less than a person walking

smooth sides simply deflect growing roots sideways, ultimately producing a thick, densely coiling root system - the dreaded 'pot-bound' effect. The Airpot, in contrast, simply air-prunes growing roots as they reach the container boundary by funnelling them

The right tree transforms a space, giving it structure, a focal point, seasonal interest and a habitat for wildlife

in wellington boots. 'We fitted a large crane to it,' Steve says, 'and now we can move trees across any lawn with 100% happy clients.'

When it comes to the day-to-day running of the nursery, Steve applies the same innovative approach. Keen to ensure that his trees are of the highest quality, they're all grown in Airpots on the nursery. Unlike a standard container, the sides of an Airpot are textured like an egg carton, with a tiny perforation at the tip of each cone. 'The ideal root system for transplanting is a fibrous one, because trees can only absorb moisture from the fine tips of their roots,' explains Steve. 'Unfortunately, conventional containers do not promote fibrous root systems, because their

into its thousands of perforations. The pruning stimulates lateral roots to grow, eventually forming a fibrous root system. In short, this system allows our trees to establish themselves quickly and continue to thrive.' But then, this is Majestic, so what would you expect?

Majestic Trees is open Monday to Friday, 8.30am-5pm and Saturday, 10am-4pm. Visit the nursery at Chequers Meadow, Chequers Hill, Flamstead, nr St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 8ET. Tel: +44 (0)1582 843881. www.majestictrees.co.uk

Turn over to find out how you can win £10,000 worth of trees and landscaping design for your own garden from Majestic Trees.



WIN A £10,000 MAKEOVER

Your garden will look wonderful with our fantastic

for your garden with Majestic Trees

prize of trees - delivered and planted for you!



Win our competition to have trees established in your garden

Every garden - large or small - needs trees. For colour, shape, verticality, blossom in spring, vibrant leaf colour in autumn or for gorgeous textured bark in winter - nothing adds drama to a garden like trees.

How would mature trees change your garden's complexion? Would a stately avenue give your newly built home the gravitas it lacks? Would a tall, living screen instantly transform an unattractive view into the tranquil outlook you have always wanted? How about a mature cluster of delicate silver birches to create a woodland glade in your native meadow? With advice from the experts at Majestic Trees, what you may have thought were just pipe dreams could become reality.

As an exclusive competition for *The English Garden* readers, Majestic Trees of Hertfordshire will design, plant and/or build

up to £10,000 worth of hard and soft landscaping for the lucky reader who presents the most persuasive case for a garden makeover. The winner will be announced in a later issue of the magazine, and *The English Garden* will follow the design and build process over the summer, culminating in a special feature on the winner's garden to be published in the autumn.

To enter, answer the question on the entry form (opposite) and submit photographs of your garden (digital or prints), along with a summary of up to 200 words as to why you believe your garden would be most dramatically transformed by the addition of mature trees. Entries can be made by post using the entry form or alternatively enter online at *The English Garden* website at www.theenglishgarden.co.uk.

MAJESTIC TREES

Established six years ago, this specialist nursery grows mature trees that provide an immediate impact upon planting. Trees range from £85 to upwards of £8,000 plus, with even the youngest trees standing in excess of 3.5m (12ft) with symmetrical crowns, virtually impossible to find at most garden centres. Majestic Trees also offer a complete design and build service. *Majestic Trees, Chequers Hill, St Albans, Herts AL3 8ET, tel: +44 (0)1582 843881. www.majestic-trees.co.uk*

Return the form with all additional information on a separate piece of paper and send to: The English Garden Majestic Trees competition, Archant House, Oriol Road, Cheltenham, Gloucester GL50 1BB. Or enter online at www.theenglishgarden.co.uk

RULES Entries limited to one per household. Entrants must be 18 years or over. The competition is not open to the employees of Archant Specialist or Majestic Trees, or their families and agents. The winner is the first correct entry chosen after the closing date of 10 April 2009. The prize must be taken before the end of 2009. No cash alternative available. Full competition rules available on receipt of SAE. The judges' decision is final; no correspondence will be entered into. You may photocopy this form.

THE ENGLISH GARDEN MAJESTIC TREES COMPETITION - MARCH, ISSUE 138

HOW TO ENTER: Complete the entry form and include the correct answer to the question below (it may help to read pages 59 to 61 first). On a separate piece of paper, describe, in no more than 200 words, why adding trees to your garden would yield the most dramatic transformation, and what effect would be achieved.

Question: Why does an Airpot-grown tree establish so quickly compared to trees grown in conventional containers?

In addition to your answer please submit:

- A photo of the proposed planting site to illustrate your case.
 - At least three photos of your garden and house, to show existing planting.
 - At least one photo showing access path from proposed parking/offloading position to planting site, to show any obstructions such as steps, gates, or walls.
 - Measurement of the narrowest point along access path, e.g. gate opening or side passage.
 - Measurement of the height of any vertical limits along access path, such as overhanging eaves.
 - Details of access restrictions close to your home (for narrow lanes, HGV restriction, no parking etc).
- These are needed for planning purposes only and will not adversely affect your entry.

Answer:

Name (Mr/Mrs/Ms):

Address:

Postcode:

Tel:

Email:



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