

The glory OF TREES

We had such a high standard of entries to our Majestic Trees competition, it was hard to pick a winner. One garden in Lancashire stood out, however, promising to be transformed with the addition of more than £10,000 worth of mature trees

PHOTOGRAPHS **JASON INGRAM** WORDS **CINEAD MCTERNAN**





FAR LEFT Competition winners Dé Peel and Edward Twinberrow take a look at the design for their garden. **ABOVE** Total transformation: the once stark garden now looks utterly changed thanks to mature trees and shrubs from Majestic Trees. **LEFT** The deep burgundy leaves of this hazel, *Corylus maxima* 'Purpurea', contrast perfectly with its neighbours *Betula pendula* and *Prunus virginiana* 'Schubert'.

Taking on a new garden that is more building site than flower-filled sanctuary can be daunting, even to the most passionate gardener. Vision is required to transform a vacant plot into an attractive retreat, and patience is essential to allow a few seasons to come and go, so plants and trees can establish themselves.

This was the scenario facing our Majestic Trees competition winners, Dé Peel and Edward Twinberrow, when they moved two years ago into a new barn conversion on the edge of the Lancashire fells. 'We had finished the barn,' says Dé, 'so the next job was to tackle the sloping, part-mud, part-lawned area to the back of the house.' With spectacular 360-degree panoramic views, she and Edward wanted to make the most of the garden without detracting from the views. They both agreed trees were a good place to start to provide structure and year-round interest, something their otherwise 'blank canvas'

garden desperately needed. 'But we had only considered buying whips from a local nursery,' admits Dé, 'and knew that we would be in for a long wait to see it all start to take shape.'

Following a setback with laying new drains in the garden, the couple's plans for tree planting were put on hold until the autumn of this year. Making the most of this enforced delay, Dé began researching the best varieties to choose. 'I was reading the March issue of *The English Garden* magazine to pick up ideas and came across the Majestic Trees competition - it seemed too good to be true. I entered, but never dreamed we would win.'

For *The English Garden* judging panel - Steve McCurdy, managing director of Majestic Trees, and the company's project design manager Sarah Shynn - Dé and Edward's entry stood out from the first. 'We really liked the garden's dramatic setting with the backdrop of the rolling Lancashire hills,' says Steve. ►

GLORIOUS GARDENS

LANCASHIRE



ABOVE LEFT The team from Majestic get started by moving trees from the lorries and into the garden. **ABOVE** Dé and Edward take a closer look at the attractive foliage of a purple-leaved ornamental cherry. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Dé, Edward and Steve McCurdy look out at the spectacular view of the Lancashire Fells; smaller shrubs can be moved by hand; Winston Woodward finishes off a planting hole with his spade; a silver birch awaits planting; Bertie the Dashchund admires one of the holes; Tom Dulieu brings in stakes to anchor some of the smaller trees.

‘And from a tree-planting point of view, it gave us the opportunity to extend the garden’s boundaries and incorporate the scenery beyond,’ he explains. ‘Our mature trees were going to make a noticeable difference to the feel of the garden too, as they would disguise the telegraph pole and soften the corners of the house, as well as introduce height and interest.’

Speaking to Dé and Edward after our editor Tamsin told them they had won was a highpoint for Steve. ‘They were really enthusiastic about the whole project and had such a clear idea about the role trees should play in their garden.’ Following a site visit where Steve could meet Dé and Edward, and see the space for himself, it was clear that the key issue was to protect the view from the back of the house. ‘It is an impressive location,’ he says, ‘giving a sense of the fells’ vastness. Native beech and ash were dotted across the fields, but it was mostly uninterrupted views of big skies and rolling hills, so it was vital that our trees added to rather than distracted from this feature.’

Dé and Edward made the journey to Majestic’s nursery to see the trees Steve and Sarah were hoping to use. ‘It was so impressive,’ says Edward. ‘I had never thought about buying big trees, but it makes such sense. It is incredible that we’ll see the benefit of such glorious and established specimens immediately, rather than having to wait until we are in our dotage!’

‘We also appreciated that they listened to our brief,’ says Dé, ‘including native beech in the selection, as we know it thrives in our sometimes less-than-favourable weather conditions.’ Other varieties featuring in the design, such as scarlet willow, *Salix alba* var. *vitellina* ‘Britzensis’ (aka ‘Chermesina’); field maple; *Acer campestre*; and a purple-leaved hazel filbert (*Corylus maxima* ‘Purpurea’), also promised to grow well in the conditions and provide plenty of seasonal interest. Unseasonably grey late summer skies looming over the

Lancashire hills didn’t dampen spirits the day Majestic Trees arrived to begin planting. ‘They made such an impressive entrance, with three huge articulated lorries filled with trees, skips, soil, and goodness knows what else,’ says Dé. ‘It was fascinating to watch the speed and efficiency of the team and exciting to think that within a matter of hours the first tree was being lifted into position.’

Seven years’ experience working with huge trees is evident, as the tree-planting looked effortless under the direction of Steve and his team. First off, canes were stuck into the ground, complete with a tree label to correspond with each specimen on the plan. Canes with red tape, rather than a label, were used to show where water pipes and electricity cables run underground.

With this process underway, the well-oiled Majestic machine revved along. Planting manager Carl Batchelor and Andy Porter, who typically runs a second planting team, expertly lifted 9m (30ft) trees off the lorries with a telescopic Manitou fork-lift, alternating every so often with bags, soil and anything else the planting team required - all day a distinctive green flash could be seen shuttling up and down the lane.

Amid this action, senior horticulturist Winston Woodward systematically dug holes. Another well-practiced routine: a mini-JCB rested on a board (to protect the grass) while it dug and moved subsoil into a series of large 1 ton ‘dumpy’ bags, which had been propped open by metal rods. Positioned within easy reach of each hole, they could be filled with the spare soil in one manoeuvre. As he moved on to the next hole, the only evidence of machinery was a slightly flattened patch of grass that had been covered by the board.

The team were excellent at housekeeping too, and once the trees had come off the lorry, the same green machines used to deliver them into the garden set to work collecting the full bags of soil to take them back to the lorry. ‘Over ►







The planting list

- 1 *Mespilus germanica* (Medlar) 3.2m (14ft)
- 2 *Fagus sylvatica* 'Atropurpurea' (Purple beech) 5.4m (18ft)
- 3 *Corylus avellana* (Hazel) 1.8m (6ft)
- 4 *Salix alba* var. *vitellina* 'Britzensis'
(or 'Chermesina') (Scarlet willow) 9m (30ft)
- 5 *Acer campestre* (Field maple) 2m (7ft)
- 6 *Corylus maxima* 'Purpurea' (Purple-leaved hazel) 1.8m (6ft)
- 7 & 8 *Betula nigra* (River birch) 3.2m & 6m (14ft & 20ft)
- 9 *Acer campestre* (Field maple) 2m (7ft)
- 10 *Salix x sepulcralis* var. *chrysocoma* (Weeping willow) 9m (30ft)
- 11 *Acer campestre* (Field maple) 2m (7ft)
- 12 *Betula nigra* (River birch) 3.2m (14ft)
- 13 *Corylus maxima* 'Purpurea' (Purple-leaved hazel) 1.8m (6ft)
- 14 *Carpinus betulus* 'Frans Fontaine' (Column hornbeam) 8.4m (28ft)
- 15 *Acer campestre* (Field maple) 2m (7ft)
- 16 *Prunus virginiana* 'Schubert' (Ornamental cherry) 7.8m (26ft)
- 17 *Acer campestre* (Field maple) 2m (7ft)
- 18 *Betula pendula* (Silver birch) 7.5m (25ft)
- 19 *Corylus maxima* 'Purpurea' (Purple-leaved hazel) 1.8m (6ft)
- 20 *Acer campestre* 'Elsrijk' (Dutch field maple) 6m (20ft)
- 21 *Cydonia oblonga* (Quince) 3.2m (14ft)
- 22 *Betula pendula* 'Youngii' (Youngs weeping birch) 5.4m (18ft)



OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Bags of soil await removal by the team; a silver birch is rolled into position and levered into the hole; Dé and Edward inspect their new trees; the Platipus anchors; a huge golden weeping willow is expertly crane-lifted over the hedge near its final planting position; field maples ready for planting. **ABOVE** The Majestic team on a well-deserved tea break: (from left) Carl Batchelor, Andy Porter, Steve McCurdy, Tom Dulieu and Winston Woodward. **RIGHT** Before the planting.

the years, we've honed this process,' laughs Steve, on a well-deserved tea break. 'Despite working with such big trees, we try to be as unobtrusive as possible and do everything we can to ensure we leave our client's garden looking magnificent.'

While all the preparatory work was essential, seeing the trees manoeuvred into their final position was by far the most exciting thing to witness. 'It looked so easy and made such an instant impact,' says Edward. 'Almost as if they were just children's toys being righted after being knocked over.' In reality, the whole process requires teamwork, precision and a bit of muscle. Protective ropes binding the tree canopy together are cut, allowing the branches to spring into shape. A quick prune whilst the tree is lying on the ground and then the massive root balls are rolled into position, as close as possible to the edge of the planting hole. One last heave and the tree drops into the hole. A strenuous back-and-forth wiggle to straighten it up and then they are staked using the invisible, underground Platipus anchors. Two last additions - slow-release fertiliser pellets and an irrigation pipe - and the hole is ready to be backfilled.

Incredibly, after just two days, the transformation of Dé and Edward's garden was complete. 'It is unrecognisable,' says Dé. 'The trees have created such a different feel in the garden. It no longer looks stark and unwelcoming. We can't wait for the different seasons, to see the quince, medlar and ornamental cherry blossom in May, and changing leaf colours in autumn. The team from Majestic Trees have breathed life into our garden and we can't wait to add borders, steps and shrubs to finish it off. It is beyond our wildest dreams and we can't thank them enough.'

Majestic Trees, Chequers Meadow, Chequers Hill, Flamstead, Nr. St. Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 8ET. Tel: +44 (0)1582 843881. www.majestictrees.co.uk Open Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm; Sat, 10am-4pm. Closed Sunday and bank holidays. Platipus Anchors Ltd, Kingsfield Business Centre, Philanthropic Road, Redhill, Surrey RH1 4DP. Tel: +44 (0)1737 762300. www.platipus-anchors.com