

The Garden

April 2015 | www.rhs.org.uk | £4.25

**CHELSEA SHOW GARDENS
THAT LIVE ON**

*The search for the
next RHS Garden*

**Magnolia time
at Borde Hill**



Tulips with merit

Celebrating RHS Award of Garden Merit tulips, group by group



Vaccinium corymbosum 'Duke' does well in containers.

GAP / CLAIRE HIGGINS

Growing blueberries in pots

If your soil is not acidic, or is based on heavy clay, try growing blueberries in containers. Many blueberries (*Vaccinium corymbosum* cultivars) are partly or fully self-fertile, but growing at least two different cultivars ensures cross-pollination and abundant crops. Pot-grown blueberries are shorter and bear about half of the yield of soil-grown plants.

❖ **Growing medium.** Plant in an ericaceous compost (one suitable for acid lovers such as *Camellia* and *Rhododendron*). Pot on gradually as plants mature: the final pot size should be 40–50cm (16–20in) across. Once this size is reached, repot every two or three years in late winter. Remove up to 20 percent of the old compost and roots, and put back into the same pot with fresh compost.

❖ **Watering and feeding.** Water regularly in dry spells, ideally with rainwater (use tap water if necessary to keep the compost moist: plants hate to dry out). Feed monthly with an ericaceous liquid fertiliser at the manufacturer's recommended rate. Avoid overfeeding.

❖ **Protection.** Give pot-grown blueberries winter protection – move containers to a cool shed or garage in cold spells, or wrap pots in hessian or bubble wrap to protect roots. In spring, protect flowers from late frosts with a double layer of horticultural fleece. Net ripening fruit against birds.

❖ **Cultivar choice.** Most blueberries can be grown in pots: 'Sunshine Blue', 'Duke' and 'Northland' are particularly good.

www.rhs.org.uk Search 'Blueberries in pots' at the RHS website.



Osteospermums from softwood cuttings

Most *Osteospermum* are considered half hardy, so are best propagated each year in spring, from softwood cuttings taken from overwintered plants. Material is taken from the soft and flexible young shoot tips of this year's growth, which root readily (in three to four weeks in optimum conditions). Pot individually and grow on for planting outdoors once the risk of frost has passed. ❖ Search 'Softwood cuttings' at the RHS website for more.



Selecting material

Take softwood cuttings about 10cm (4in) long, from non-flowering shoots (these root more readily). Cut off above a bud on the parent plant and place in a clean plastic bag to avoid drying out. Store in a fridge if cuttings cannot be prepared straight away.



Insert prepared cuttings

Trim each stem below a leaf joint (node) to make cuttings 5cm (2in) long. Remove lower leaves, pinch out the soft tip and dip cutting bases in hormone rooting powder or liquid. Insert cuttings into containers or modules of free-draining cuttings compost.



Grow on and plant out

Insert cuttings up to the lowest leaves, firm in gently and water well. Cover with a clear polythene bag or place in a propagator with bottom heat of 18–24°C (64–75°F). Once rooted, pot up cuttings individually and harden off before planting outdoors.

Compact cultivars

Shrubs purchased as small, well-clipped, fresh container-grown plants can be difficult to visualise fully grown. When mature, many shrubs may display an arching, sprawling habit, and can grow much larger than expected.

New compact cultivars are frequently introduced, and nurseries spend considerable time and effort producing them. These are selections of commonly grown shrubs specifically developed to grow to a much-reduced size, but often with the same growth habit. They are easy to grow and position, needing much the same growing conditions favoured by older, larger cultivars without the need for regular pruning or lots of space. Although relatively slow growing, they do not take long to reach maturity.



Compact plants, such as *Buddleja* Buzz Series, suit smaller spaces.

cultivar	height & spread
<i>Buddleja davidii</i> Buzz Series	120 x 90cm (48 x 36in)
<i>Choisya</i> 'Royal Lace'	75 x 75cm (30 x 30in)
<i>Clethra alnifolia</i> 'Hummingbird'	60 x 75cm (24 x 30in)
<i>Daphne x napolitana</i> 'Meon'	45 x 45cm (18 x 18in)
<i>Forsythia</i> Marée d'Or ('Courtasol')	75 x 75cm (30 x 30in)
<i>Fuchsia magellanica</i> 'Pumila'	45 x 60cm (18 x 24in)
<i>Lavatera x clementii</i> 'Barnsley Baby'	75 x 60cm (30 x 24in)
<i>Lophomyrtus x ralphii</i> 'Little Star'	50 x 60cm (20 x 24in)
<i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Harbour Dwarf'	45 x 60cm (18 x 24in)
<i>Perovskia</i> 'Little Spire'	75 x 60cm (30 x 24in)
<i>Photinia x fraseri</i> 'Little Red Robin'	90 x 90cm (36 x 36in)
<i>Pittosporum tenuifolium</i> 'Golf Ball'	75 x 90cm (30 x 36in)
<i>Weigela florida</i> Monet ('Verweig')	60 x 60cm (24 x 24in)

Slow growers

Some shrubs put on little growth each year, so will occupy a space for several years before they need pruning to maintain their size. Many plant labels describe the size after 10 years by height and spread, but they may continue to grow for decades.

- ❖ Conifers with sculptural shapes are well suited if chosen carefully. Try *Abies koreana* 'Blauer Eskimo', *Juniperus communis* 'Compressa' or *Picea glauca* var. *albertiana* 'Alberta Globe'.
- ❖ Other slow-growing evergreens include *Daphne tangutica*, *Ilex crenata* and *Pittosporum tobira*.
- ❖ For seasonal interest and flower try *Corylopsis pauciflora*, *Loropetalum chinense* var. *rubrum* 'Fire Dance' or *Prunus incisa* 'Kojo-no-mai'.



Prunus incisa 'Kojo-no-mai'

Regular clipping to control growth

Evergreens such as box (*Buxus*) and yew (*Taxus*) are often clipped regularly with shears into topiary while restricting growth. This treatment also suits *Hebe*, *Ilex crenata*, *Lonicera nitida* and *Pittosporum tenuifolium*. Tip-prune young plants of *Ceanothus*, *Cytisus*, *Genista* and *Lavandula* to encourage plenty of fresh growth and, once established, lightly cut back the previous season's growth. Avoid cutting into older, woody stems as they tend not to reshoot.

As well as restricting size, for some shrubs regular clipping encourages growth of new coloured foliage. Trim evergreen *Photinia* by up to 15cm (6in) to promote bright red shoots. Some spiraeas with colourful spring foliage benefit from annual clipping after flowering to produce a new flush of growth.



RHS / TIM SANDALL



RHS / TIM SANDALL

Grow in containers

Compact shrubs with a smaller rootball and slower growth rate are ideal for pots.

Create focal points with topiary shapes, add seasonal colour and revitalise dull corners. Use containers to grow shrubs not suited to your soil, for example acid-loving camellias (above). Grow tender shrubs in containers so you can move them to frost-free conditions for winter.

- ❖ Plant up in early spring using soil-based compost (such as John Innes No.3). Add general-purpose fertiliser at the manufacturers' rates.
- ❖ Check the moisture of the compost daily from April to September.
- ❖ Reduce watering during winter but check evergreens and water if needed.
- ❖ Repot in early spring every two to four years. In between, topdress by scraping off 5cm (2in) of compost and replace with fresh.

PROBLEM SOLVER

Shrubs for small spaces

Continuing the series of practical approaches to common garden problems

Author: **Laurel Emms**, Horticultural Advisor, RHS Garden Wisley

Selecting a shrub for a confined space in a border, a patio container or when planting up a small garden has never been easier. An amazing choice of sizes and shapes are available.

Shrubs form the basic framework of a garden and are valuable for colour and texture, but many become large over time, casting shade, outgrowing their space and crowding out other plants. Fortunately, old favourites of typically large-growing shrubs have made way for more diminutive introductions that will remain small, while retaining their inherent charm, and not become difficult to manage.

Containing the size of larger shrubs by employing different techniques for regular pruning also adds to the strategies to allow shrubs their place in a small space. ●



GAP / ELKE BORKOWSKI

Creative pruning

Pruning techniques provide a way to fit larger shrubs artistically into a restricted or narrow space. For example, shorten overlong stems of *Mahonia x media* to lower sideshoots after flowering.

- ❖ **Wall training:** shrubs do not naturally climb but, with specific pruning, they can be trained to grow flat against walls, take up less space and promote vertical interest. *Argyrocitrus battandieri*, *Ceanothus*, *Fremontodendron* and *Piptanthus nepalensis* thrive with the warmth and support of a wall or fence; *Itea ilicifolia* and *Ribes speciosum* are excellent for shady walls. Espalier or fan training, as used for fruit, suits ornamentals such as cotoneasters and pyracanthas.



MINGI / BENNET SMITH

Wall training: tie in new growth regularly to fill the allotted space. Prune back overlong shoots.

- ❖ **Coppicing:** this is the term for the regular, sometimes annual cutting back of a tree or shrub to near ground level. Use it for ornamental effect to obtain a crop of young colourful winter stems; dogwoods (*Cornus*, pictured right) and willow (*Salix*) are frequently managed this way. Helping to keep the plant compact, coppicing encourages prominent leaves on *Catalpa* and *Cotinus*, and wands of upright growth on *Hydrangea paniculata* and *Perovskia*.
- ❖ **Crown lifting:** removing lower branches provides areas for planting under larger shrubs. Create small trees using shrubs instead. Evergreen *Ceanothus* 'Puget Blue' (pictured, far right), *Escallonia* 'Peach Blossom' or *Photinia x fraseri* 'Red Robin' are ideal for this treatment.



RHS / TIM SANDALL

Coppicing: cut back all stems close to the ground, or to the previous year's pruned stubs.



TGC / DEREK ST ROMANE

Crown lifting: use a sharp pruning saw to selectively remove lower branches.

MORE ON SMALL SHRUBS

- ❖ Find more shrubs suitable for small gardens at www.rhs.org.uk/findaplant
- ❖ For more information on pruning techniques (evergreens, wall shrubs, topiary, coppicing, cloud pruning and renovation) search 'Pruning' at www.rhs.org.uk/advice
- ❖ For information on planting up and maintaining containers, search 'Containers' at www.rhs.org.uk/advice