

WOODLAND GARDENS

How to create a woodland garden and
the top 15 plants for a woodland garden



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INTRODUCTION

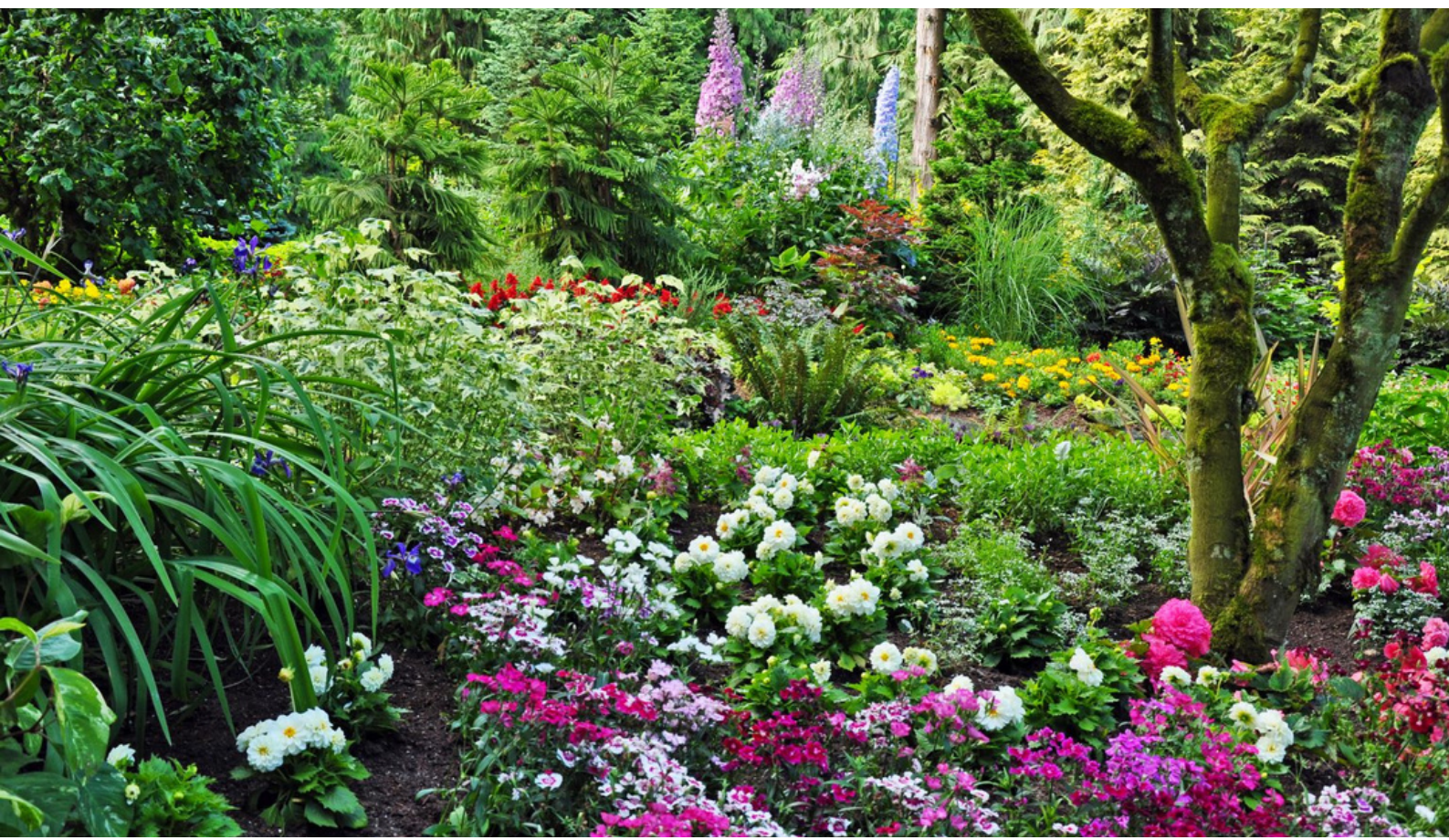
What is a Woodland garden?

Possibly the most striking and natural of the planting displays, a Woodland is a plantsman's dream, and the possibilities are endless. They require a bit of space, but they also allow for an incredible range of plants. Woodland gardens encourage many other life forms, including lichens, mosses, birds and fungi. The key to a woodland garden is to plant in tiers and to form a planting community. A broad range of plants is suited to the conditions in a woodland. Full sun-loving trees through to shade-loving shrubs and perennials make up the variety of woodland plants.

How to create a woodland garden

Plants are happiest when growing in associations or communities. This greatly helps with their husbandry and general health. Once the ground cover is established and a canopy is formed, the maintenance required to look after a Woodland border is minimal. A balance between plants and wildlife will establish, and it is just left to the gardener to keep an eye on the individual plant's well-being and soil health.

Planting in tiers is how we create the ultimate woodland garden. Trees planted for the overstorey are underplanted with shrubs; beneath this, ground cover can be planted to colonise the woodland floor. The garden can then go subterranean through the planting of woodland bulbs, and finally, all levels can be transcended by allowing climbers to scramble up and through our woodland layers.



HOW DO YOU CREATE A WOODLAND GARDEN?

Scale is necessary for a woodland garden, which makes it a touch tricky for small spaces. But a wide border, around 7.5 to 10 meters, can be used to create a window into a woodland garden.

Usually, when designing a garden, it is the hard landscaped areas that get mapped first, but here it is the plants that rule and it's suggested that choosing the plants should be a top priority.

Consider what tree line you want. Think about the heights and widths of tree crowns. Deciduous trees should be given priority as these will let the light through to the ground cover and bulbs in the spring. However, the occasional evergreen specimen will add to the overall effect. Shrubs and groundcover should be planted in groups and drifts to fill out the area quickly, and climbers should be of a rambling nature.

Once you are happy with your choice of planting or at least the early backbone of it, it's time to make sure we are creating the right conditions for our woodland garden. A rich free draining loam is needed for it to thrive, therefore composting both before planting and in continuous seasons is vital. It is recommended that a composting area be incorporated into the garden.

There are a few golden rules to composting. Make sure that brown and green materials are mixed equally, for example, 50% grass cutting mixed with 50% shredded paper. Alternatively, try 50% fruit peelings or weeds with 50% straw or ripped-up cardboard. It's also good practice to gently turn and water your compost as it builds up, allowing air and moisture to encourage the micro-organisms and worms that help it break down. This practice will produce the gardener's gold that is composted and do your woodland garden wonders. Another little tip is to collect leaves in the autumn as they fall and place them in their compost area and this leaf mould makes for a great soil conditioner when added.

TOP 15 PLANTS FOR A WOODLAND GARDEN



1



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Betula utilis Jacquemontii

Hard to think of a more graceful tree than this beautiful variety of Birch tree. The intense white bark, that exfoliates as it ages is a feature that will draw you to this tree time and time again. It is small to medium-sized in stature, growing eight meters in height and 4 meters in width. Birch trees have superb seasonal characteristics, including Catkins, autumn colour, incredible bark and its graceful winter form. It is happy in snow or partial shade and tolerates most soils.



2



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Hedra Hibernica

This self-clinging climbing Ivy is a perfect addition to a woodland display. It adds another dimension to your tier, planting with its ability to climb and mix with other plants. The evergreen leaves are glossy and will vary in size depending on where they are on the plant. It produces small yellow-green flowers in summer, which are not so significant to its looks but are loved by pollinating insects. Its black fruits are loved by birds as are its leaves which will be nested in by small birds.



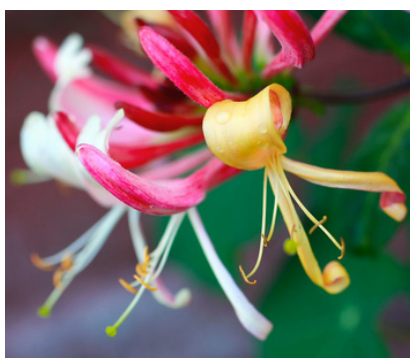
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Helleborus 'Foetidus' – 'Green Marble'

The ground cover of a woodland garden should be a journey of discovery. This Hellebore thrives in partial shade, meriting a spot in this style of garden. This herbaceous evergreen plant has an erect habit reaching 40 cm in height. It produces beautiful subtle pale green flowers which appear in late winter and light up those dank grey winter skies, they are a breath of fresh air that lifts the winter spirits.



4



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Lonicera periclymenum Belgica

This Honeysuckle is a rambling free willed character that fits nicely into the loose nature of a woodland planting scheme. Its twining evergreen nature is brought to life with beautiful bronze foliage in the early part of the summer, which sets off the amazing yellow flowers that appear in early summer. The bronze leaves will fade to green as the season progresses, but its climbing habit gives another layer to our woodland planting scheme and given the support it can reach up to ten meters.



5



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Ilex 'Golden King'

The Portuguese Laurel will add structure to a border or perimeter of a garden. This hardy, evergreen shrub has dark waxy leaves that are narrow and ovate in shape, born on dark red shoots. They produce spikes of white flowers in early summer, followed by dark purple fruits. A superb hedging subject, this Prunus is happy to grow in all soil types, provided that it drains freely. These plants are quite happy in full sun or partially shady aspects.

TOP 15 PLANTS FOR A WOODLAND GARDEN



6

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Hydrangea Quercifolia 'Snow Queen'

A superb second-storey shrub with big lobed Oak style leaves, this plant has become incredibly popular in recent years. It is easy to see why, as this plant, in addition to having great leaves, produces large panicles of creamy white flowers from early summer right through until the autumn. It is in the autumn that it produces another stunning party piece with its autumn colour, its leaves turning a rich plum red that can last well into the autumn.



7

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Pachysandra Terminalis

It's often asked what can be grown in those impossible places, particularly right up against the base of a tree, where most plants would soon perish. Pachysandra, however, is one of the toughest ground-covering plants, going is both shade tolerant and sun loving. This Gardening Express plant is made up of glossy evergreen leathery leaves that form robust clumps reaching not much more than 50 cm in height and width. In summer, small white flowers form in clusters.



8

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Pieris 'Forest Flame'

A beautiful specimen shrub that can take pride of place in any Woodland border or garden. Forest Flame has several tricks up its sleeve. The first one of note is the striking pink to red-shoots that appear in spring as it puts on a new spurt of growth. These are then topped with beautiful racemes of small white bell flowers also appearing in spring. Both of these features will endure well into summer, standing out beautifully against the dark, evergreen leathery leaves.



9

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Anemone 'Honorine Jobert'

A traditional classic garden plant that most people with an interest in plants would recognise. Producing large clusters of multiple flower heads in late summer colour, just as all other herbaceous perennials start to fade at the end of the season. It's a tough plant that, once established, will never let you down and displays pure white flowers in late summer well into autumn. The white flowers stand out beautifully against the dark green leaves, happy to be planted in the sun, but more importantly they are also happy in partial shade.



10

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Dryopteris wallichiana 'Jurrassic Gold'

Woodlands and ferns go like a hand in glove; they look so at home in a multiple plant environment. They come in many shapes and sizes and the Dryopteris is a prime example of a graceful herbaceous foliage plant that has bright gold leaves which create a softening impression on the floor of the woodland garden. These beauties are clump-forming, growing from a central crown; they can reach up to 50cm in height and over a meter in width.

TOP 15 PLANTS FOR A WOODLAND GARDEN



11

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Davidia Involucrata

A once is a lifetime tree that thoroughly deserves the investment. It is deciduous by nature and will need a bit of space, growing to 12 meters in height at maturity with a width of eight meters. However, it is an incredible tree with a graceful spreading crown and amazing, unusual flowers, which are really a bract, meaning a modified white leaf that shields the flower itself.



12

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Polypodium vulgare

Another great woodland Ground floor plant that sits naturally in the tiered planting design. Grown for its foliage, this plant has simple compound leaves often speckled with brown spores. It forms rhizomes that creep, enabling this plant to be very successful at colonising territory. Its 30 cm height, evergreen nature, and ability to grow in partial shade make it an excellent groundcover.



13

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Digitalis 'Plum Gold'

Foxgloves are familiar in woodlands as well as gardens where they add height and colour to borders. They are loved by both gardeners and insects who prize Digitalis for its pollen-rich flowers. 'Plum Gold' is a gorgeous, compact, semi-evergreen perennial producing 60cm tall spires of dark pink-red flowers. This perennial dies back each winter before returning in spring.



14

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Acer Palmatum 'Bihou'

The woodland garden naturally is the habitat for a Japanese Maple. When seen growing in the wild in Japan, they grow can grow as second trees bathing in the speckled shade of taller first-tier trees. This variety of Acer is a plant you will become very attached to, it is shrub-like by nature and is fully clothed with delicate palmate leaves through summer. This plant isn't finished there, it really is a plant of four seasons, and its winter display consists of golden yellow and orange stems.



15

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Cornus Controversa Variegata

This is a tree that once looked at, is rarely forgotten. Some people call this the wedding cake tree because of its distinctive, horizontal, tiered habit, with the branches forming layers. It has bright green leaves with bold, creamy-white margins, which turn magnificent red-purple in autumn. This Cornus produces clusters of white flowers in June. It's small to medium stature can reach up to eight meters in height and width.

10 INSPIRING IDEAS FOR WOODLAND GARDENS

Creating your woodland garden will provide you with a peaceful garden oasis where you can sit and relax, away from the rush of daily life. To inspire you, we have collected a series of inspirational ideas to help get your woodland project underway.

1. Visit the Gibberd Garden in Harlow, a stunning example of combining woodland-style planting with focal points and features.
2. Make the most of seasonality. Woodland gardens have something to offer from each season of the year with Autumn and spring being particular highlights
3. Create winding pathways amongst the dense planting to get you closer to the plants.
4. The Wildlife Trust provide great ideas for maintaining a healthy woodland garden and detail the wildlife that will be attracted to your woodland. Native species of plants would help this further.
5. Combine and contrast plant forms and foliage for dramatic effect. Much of the joy of a cool woodland garden is the plants' foliage; consider the changing colours of the seasons and how you can combine huge lush foliage with small delicate leaves.
6. Relax the planting by combining huge drifts of bulbs with densely packed borders. It will take a couple of years of tweaking planting schemes to get the result you will want but it will be worth the wait.
7. Utilise light canopy trees, which will allow light to reach the lower tiers of planting. Flowering plants crave some sunshine and trees such as Silver Birches don't block the sun from the shrubs, perennials and bulbs below.
8. Lift the crowns of trees by removing the lower branches, providing space and light for shrubs and perennials to establish.
9. Add oversized pots and foliage points amongst the planting to draw your eye around the garden.
10. Add a seating area in the middle of the woodland garden where you can sit while away the hours. Your mental health will benefit from the calm you have created.

Chris Bonnett, the gardening expert of The Express newspaper, says that 'A walk within a woodland garden refreshes your mind better than any other form of garden', and we have to agree. Treat yourself to an area of calm you can return to whenever you need to recharge your batteries.

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