

TREES NEAR TO BUILDINGS

HOW NEAR

In times past the closest tree planting was around 8 metres to buildings, however that would just about exclude any tree in today's urban environment so a more pragmatic approach is needed.

By a process of plant selection, nurseymen have made available new cultivars of familiar tree which can tolerate confined spaces. They have smaller, narrower crowns and less demanding root systems.

A more direct route has been to create a new tree using parts of existing ones. A healthy root system can be matched to a selection that grows a perfect straight stem, and then a top graft is put on which has a small rounded crown - eg Catalpa Bungei

Root barriers have also made it possible to plant trees at the closest limit of their crown development. For practical purposes this would be 3 metres for small or fastigate forms although the limiting factor could be loss of daylight through adjacent windows.

HOW BIG

The height of any tree is determined by the ground conditions it is growing in. Many of the tree heights found in texts are describing the 'potential final height' eg given a parkland setting. So, it's often the case that many 'large' trees planted in confined areas will not achieve their potential height but remain small to medium sized trees. Nevertheless it's worth looking at some of the trees that specifically chosen for their merits as 'urban trees'.

ROOTS

Modern construction methods and materials have limited the potential for tree roots to extend beyond their designated area. Sometimes they can 'escape' where an opportunity occurs such as pavement repairs but the situation today for trees is quite different to the construction approach of previous years. Many old pavement trees are actually growing in the adjacent gardens as flagstone pavements were originally laid on simple cinder beds. These allowed the trees to extend to adjacent front lawns.

Nowadays compaction equipment used in construction can easily achieve a hardness which no roots can penetrate, so the opportunity for tree roots to affect buildings or highways is fairly limited. Further control of the root run can be achieved using root barriers, however these need very careful consideration.



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