

Salix - Growing Guide

Introduction To Salix

Willow

Willow species come in very varying shapes and ultimate sizes. Some are dwarf rockery plants, some are taller growing shrubs, and some are trees.

Willows do, however, have a number of characteristics in common. They dislike shallow chalk soils and grow best in deep, moist soils which do not necessarily have to be beside streams and water but often are. Dwarf species need no pruning and nor do those species growing as weeping trees. Other shrubby varieties, which are primarily grown for their winter stem colours, can be regularly pollarded to encourage vigorous regrowth in much the same way as you would prune coloured stemmed dogwoods. Waterside growing weeping willows are often pollarded completely to a crown at 10-20ft to rejuvenate them and extend their lives, but this is clearly a job for a tree surgeon.

Taller growing willows propagate fairly easily from hardwood winter cuttings set in bare earth in a damp location and preferably in shade.

Dwarf Growing Willows For The Rockery Or Shrub Border

S. hastata 'Wehrhahnii' grows to around 3ft in height eventually as an upright shrub. Its key attribute is its conspicuous silvery-grey male catkins (3in long) which appear well before the leaves.

S. helvetica is even smaller growing as an upright branched shrub with grey-green leaves. It also has large silvery grey catkins in advance of its leaves. This is an alpine species.

S. lanata, the woolly willow, grows to around 3ft, has a compact habit, and is also a European native. Its male catkins are golden yellow, and the female ones are grey-yellow. Both appear with the leaves in spring.

Taller Growing 'Shrubby' Willows Suitable For Woodland Or Waterside Planting

S. cinerea, the grey willow, grows to 20ft or more and has stout pubescent twigs. The catkins appear on this native willow in profusion before the leaves in early spring.

S. exigua, the coyote willow, grows to 10-12ft and is ideal on sandy soils. Its grey-green leaves are covered in silvery grey hairs when young. The catkins are grey-yellow, and this is a suckering, thicket forming species.

S. fargesii is a plant with rather more potential as a freestanding plant in a woodland setting. It has gorgeous red autumn colour, and the green young shoots turn red-brown. Our stock plant grows to only around 10ft with a similar spread. It originates from China and needs no pruning at all.



Salix fargesii



Salix fargesii



Salix fargesii



Salix moupinense



S. moupinense & fargesii
similar but not the same!

S. udensis 'Golden Sunshine', dragon willow, has shocking bright yellow leaves which seem, with us, not to scorch even in full sun. This is a vigorous tall growing shrub which needs hacking back to ground level every few years so you can keep it under control and appreciate the new growth foliage.



Salix 'Golden Sunshine'

S. babylonica 'Tortuosa', the tortured willow, is a fast-growing upright tree which has peculiar, twisted shoots and bright green twisted leaves. The catkins are yellow green. This is also a plant much sought after by flower arrangers and it often looks its best when leafless in winter. It will grow eventually to 40-50ft but can be pollarded if need be.

S. caprea 'Kilmarnock' is a weeping (usually top grafted) tree of about 5-6ft in height which develops a trailing 'skirt' of drooping branches that touch the ground. Before the leaves appear, it has a stunning display of grey catkins studded with yellow anthers. A perfect feature tree for the centre of a lawn or in a more formal herbaceous border?

S. daphnoides, violet willow, grows into a spreading 25ft tall tree. It comes into its own in winter with its purple new growth shoots. Silvery-grey catkins before the leaves.

S. x sepulcralis 'Erythroflexuosa', the curly golden willow, has vigorous contorted orange-yellow stems which offset nicely with its green leaves and stand out beautifully in winter.

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