

# TEN TREES FOR CANBERRA GARDENS

A DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR PUBLICATION



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# **TEN TREES FOR CANBERRA GARDENS**

The selection of trees in this booklet has proved suitable for use in Canberra.

This does not imply that they are available from the Department's Yarralumla Garden Centre, but they can be obtained through commercial nurseries.

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*Aerial view of part of Canberra.*

Trees form the basic framework for every garden and provide the focal points for other features such as shrubs, perennials and flower beds.

They may be grown for many purposes including summer shade, wind protection, flowers, fruits and autumn leaves. Care should be taken to ensure that the position chosen for the tree allows it to develop to its best advantage. Trees grown for summer shade should be placed so the maximum shade benefit is achieved during the warmer times of the day and year. The position for evergreen trees must be carefully chosen so they do not prevent winter sun reaching the house, or cast unwelcome shadow on clothes lines or the children's playing area.



The ultimate height and spread of the tree must be considered so it can develop fully. Avoid the disappointment which results when trees have to be removed because they were incorrectly placed at planting.

This booklet describes ten of the trees which have proved hardy under local conditions and can be recommended for planting in Canberra gardens.

The trees have been selected for their general form, beauty and hardiness, as well as an overall absence of disease or insect pests. Each tree has been chosen because it has at least one characteristic desirable for the home garden. There are other trees which might have been included. The ten species described are not the only ones suitable for local use. They have been chosen to provide a guide to the newcomer to Canberra who is faced with a large list of species to choose from and finds selection difficult.



## PRUNUS CERASIFERA 'NIGRA'

### Single Flowering Plum

Grown both for its dark burgundy foliage and deep pink single flowers which cover the tree in late August, *Prunus cerasifera* 'Nigra' is an ideal home garden tree, which grows extremely well in Canberra.

Single Flowering Plum is one of the large group of plants called *Prunus* which provides many varieties of plum, peach and cherry cultivated for their edible fruit as well as the vast range of ornamental trees grown for their attractive flowers and foliage.

Single Flowering Plum is a small tree growing to a height of 15-20 feet and an almost equal crown spread. It is deciduous in winter and the pink single flowers which are borne in profusion in spring appear before the leaves. The flowers are followed by small red fruit which although inclined to be sour can be used for jam and are eaten with relish by small boys. The leaves are burgundy in colour throughout the year and provide a useful contrast in the garden particularly when planted near deep green conifers or plants with soft grey foliage such as Eucalypts or Acacias.

*Prunus cerasifera* 'Nigra' is largely free of insect and fungal pests. Pear and cherry slug may attack in some seasons but usually not as severely as on cherries. Although related botanically to the flowering peaches which suffer badly with leaf curl in spring, flowering plum is free from this troublesome disease.

The species is propagated vegetatively by budding to ensure that all plants are uniform in leaf type and flower colour.

A number of closely related varieties can be grown successfully in Canberra and differ from the species described largely in depth of flower colour, some being almost white, and on the time of flowering; these include:

*Prunus cerasifera* 'Pissardii'; *Prunus cerasifera*;  
*Prunus blireiana*; *Prunus moseri*.

Good examples of this species can be seen in many home gardens and as street trees.





## ALBIZZIA JULIBRISSIN

### Silk Tree

*Albizzia julibrissin* is a relatively recent introduction to Canberra and has grown extremely well. It is obviously well suited to the climate.

There are several species of *Albizzia* which are native to Australia but all are frost tender in Canberra. New-comers may be familiar with *A. lophantha* which is grown widely in Melbourne and Sydney.

The Silk Tree forms a wide-headed deciduous tree growing rapidly to a height of 20 to 30 feet with an equal crown spread.

The foliage is deep green in colour. Each main leaf is composed of many fine leaflets or pinnae. These resemble the leaves of some *Acacias* and the *Jacaranda*—well known in milder climates—but which is frost tender in Canberra.

The fine leaves have the distinctive feature of folding up at night and a tree seen after dusk presents a strikingly different appearance to one seen by day.

The light pink flowers which appear in January-February open into rounded clusters which have a silky appearance. Flat, light green pods follow the pink flowers.

*Albizzia* is often planted as a shade tree in paved areas or near a terrace where the leaves cast delicate shade in summer. It is best reserved for these special situations.

Silk trees may suffer from borers which cause unsightly holes. These may weaken the stem when the attack occurs near branch junctions. Scraping out the borer hole with fine wire and injecting methylated spirit or systemic insecticide will kill the young borers, and control the attacks.

*Albizzia* has been planted in Canberra, mostly as specimen trees in parks and courtyards. The oldest examples can be seen in the Green Square, Kingston, and the park at Griffith Shops.





**EUCALYPTUS CINEREA**

## Argyle Apple

Unfortunately many Eucalypts become too tall and massive for the average home garden and are best reserved for planting in parks and streets.

Argyle Apple is an exception to this rule and can be recommended for the home garden where a medium size dense foliated evergreen is required. It grows to 40 feet in height with a crown spread of up to 30 feet.

An attractive feature of the species is the glaucous, or blue green foliage, which persists throughout the tree's life.

The bark is brown, rough and fibrous.

Unlike most Eucalypts, *E. cinerea* holds its lower branches even as an old tree. These can be left unpruned and allowed to droop and reach the ground, providing an excellent screen or windbreak.

Native to Southern N.S.W. north of the A.C.T., it is common on the Hume Highway between Goulburn and Berrima, although many of the trees near the roadside are straggly due to poor conditions. It responds well to garden conditions and forms a dense crowned tree.

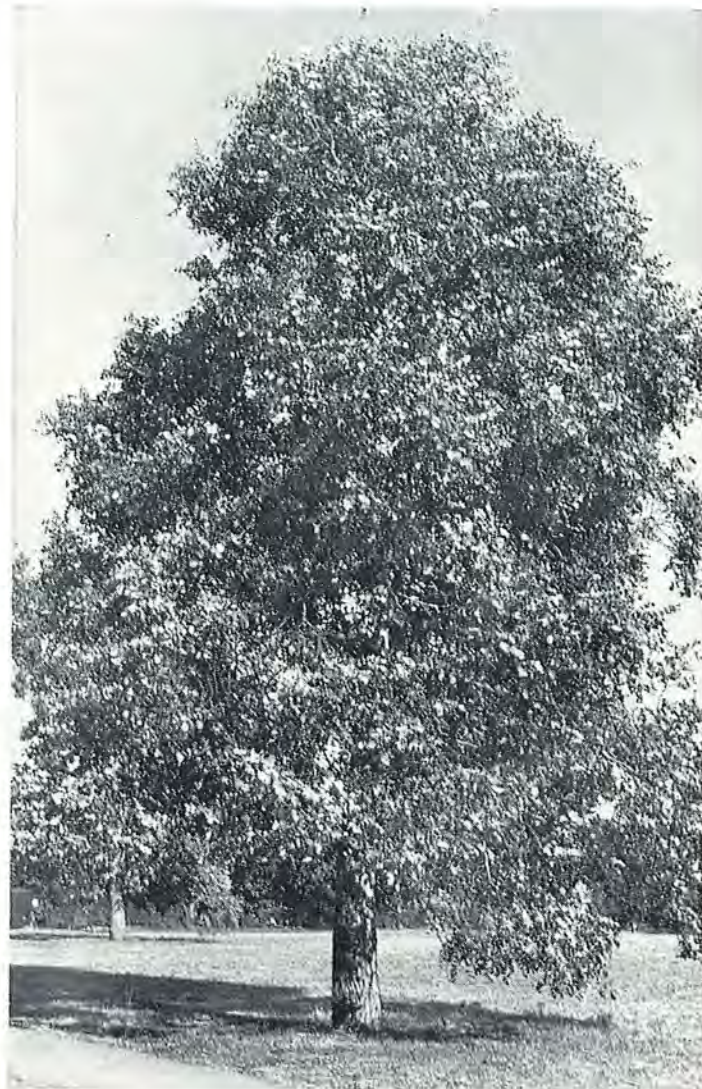
Buds are in threes in the axils of the round blue-green leaves, and the small white flowers appear in spring and develop into capsules, or 'gum nuts', containing seeds.

Being evergreen the tree should not be planted close to a house or where its shade in winter may be unwelcome.

Plants are raised from seed and should be transplanted into the garden when 10 in to 15 in in height. Argyle Apple may be slow to develop a strong leading stem during the first year but it can be assisted by staking. Once established it grows vigorously, in some cases up to 3-4 feet per year.

It may suffer in some seasons from a scale insect which forms a white spongy cover on young branches. Attacks by beetles may occasionally cause leaf damage. Both these pests can be controlled by spraying, although this becomes more difficult as the tree increases in size.

Good examples of this species can be seen in Telopea Park, Henty Street, Braddon, and McArthur Avenue, O'Connor.





## LIQUIDAMBER STYRACIFLUA

### Sweet Gum

Sweet Gum is a tall deciduous tree native to the eastern U.S.A. where it is an important forest species, sometimes reaching a height of 140 feet. Under local conditions the maximum height is about 40 feet. It is broadly pyramidal in shape with a strong development of the main central stem. The leaves are palmate, shining green, 4 in to 6 in wide with 5 to 7 lobes. The young stems are smooth but soon develop a persistent corky bark. This is often mistaken for disease or insect damage but it is a natural characteristic of the tree and adds to its attractiveness in winter.

The most important feature of Sweet Gum is its autumn colouring which develops somewhat later than most other species. From late April into May the leaves change from yellow or orange to scarlet, crimson and purple red. There is a considerable variation in the brilliance of the autumn colour, due partly to growing conditions, but also to natural variation within the species.

Sweet Gum, sometimes called Liquidamber, is usually raised from seed. Vegetative propagation by budding or cuttings is sometimes practised to reproduce forms with exceptionally good autumn colour. One of these—Festeri—is noted for its smooth bark and deep burgundy autumn foliage which persists well into winter. Another is a Canberra selection Tirriki, noted for a clear red autumn colour.

Liquidamber will grow in most soil types but the tree prefers a deep, rich, moist soil for optimum growth. Native to wet swampy sites in North America, it can be grown in wetter, more poorly drained soil than many other deciduous trees. Protection from hot winds is desirable to prevent foliage burn which reduces its autumn display.

It is free of insect and fungal pests.

Sweet Gum has been widely planted in home gardens in Canberra where its formal shape can be used to advantage. It has also been planted as a street tree in Bougainville Street, Manuka; Knibbs Street, Turner; Cunningham Street, Kingston; and Fairbridge Crescent, Ainslie.





## **CUPRESSUS SEMPERVIRENS VAR. 'STRICTA'**

### Roman Cypress

Roman Cypress is a member of the large group of trees called conifers, which contain many of the world's most important softwood timbers. Most conifers are distinguished from other plants by their needle-like foliage and woody cones which enclose seeds.

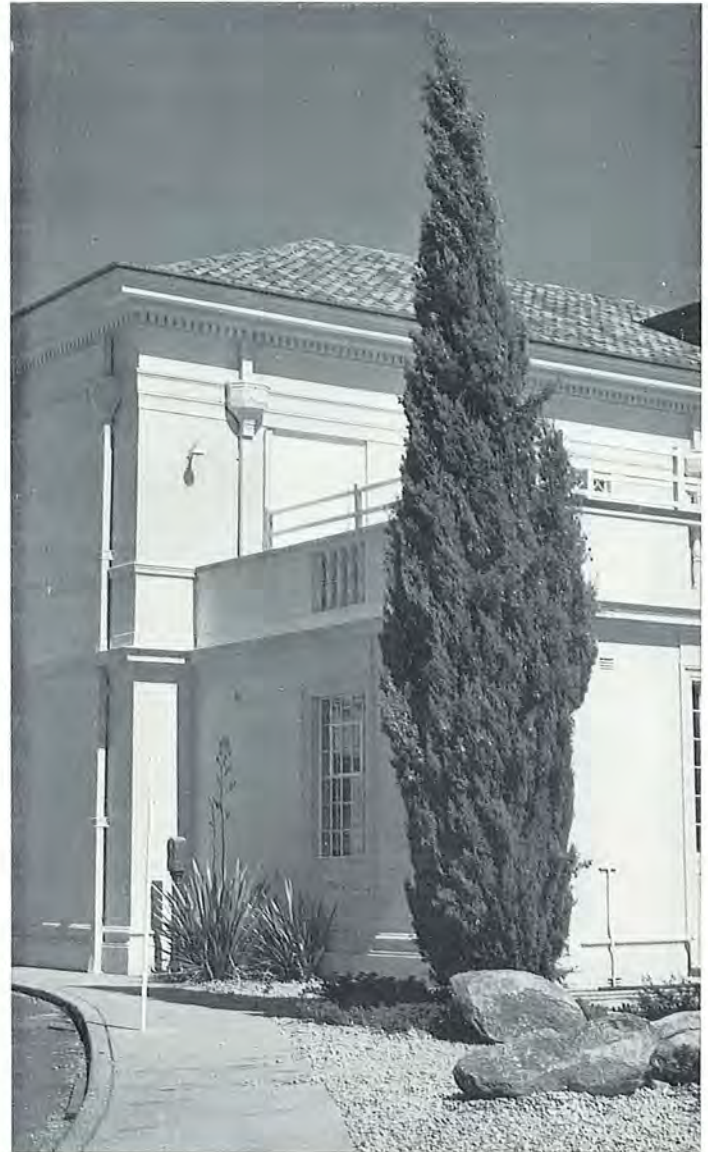
Roman Cypress or, as it is sometimes called, Pencil Pine, is one of the better known conifers and is widely planted in home gardens and public parks where its distinctive formal shape is required for landscape effect. The tree is a dense evergreen, with dark green foliage and narrow upright form eventually reaching a height of about 40-50 feet. Roman Cypress is a rather slow grower.

Roman Cypress is extremely hardy and resistant to most insect and fungal pests. Like most conifers it should not be grown in soils subjected to waterlogging. It can withstand light clipping to help maintain compact shape but it will not shoot readily from old wood.

This tree was extremely popular in the 1930's when it was often planted in pairs beside entrances or gateways. Although it has lost some of its popularity with the trend towards more informal gardens, Roman Cypress can find a useful place in the garden where its dark evergreen foliage and upright form can be used to advantage.

A most impressive planting of Roman Cypress can be seen on City Hill where trees planted more than 30 years ago are reaching maturity. These trees have responded well to grassing and regular irrigation of this area. Although extremely hardy, Roman Cypress grows even better with good cultural conditions.

This species has been planted in many home gardens and in Drake Street, Ainslie.





### Box Elder

Box Elder is a member of the large group of trees—Maples—which are widely distributed in the Northern Hemisphere.

It is one of the few species of the group which grow well, without special care, under local conditions. Other species such as Japanese Maple and Norway Maple, suffer from Canberra's dry summers and hot winds, and need considerable protection if they are to be grown successfully.

A native of North America, Box Elder is well adapted to local climatic and soil conditions, and eventually reaches a height of 30-40 feet with a crown spread of 20-25 feet.

It is deciduous, the leaves turning yellow to orange in early autumn. The young, bare twigs, covered with a whitish bloom and leaf buds, are attractive in winter.

Pendant clusters of yellow flowers, tinged with green, are borne in early spring and are followed by small winged fruit.

Growth is very rapid when young, making it a useful species for planting in the new home garden. Pruning of side branches in winter may be necessary to assist the main trunk to develop and maintain a good shape. If left unpruned the tree may often develop an open crown.

It has been planted widely as a street tree and in parks and home gardens where its main features of rapid growth, deciduous habit, and yellow leaf colour in autumn can be used to advantage.

It is virtually free of insect or fungal pests. Propagation is mostly from seed, although several horticultural forms having variegated leaves are propagated by budding.

Good examples of Box Elder can be seen in Bannister Gardens, Griffith, and Hannan Crescent, Ainslie.





**FRAXINUS sp. 'RAYWOODII'**

## Claret Ash

This tree is one of a large group native to the Northern Hemisphere, some of which give valuable timber, commonly known as 'ash'. Many are also widely used as ornamental trees for street and park plantings.

*Fraxinus sp. raywoodii* is one of the most spectacular members of the group. It has brilliant red foliage in autumn, giving it the very apt common name of Claret Ash.

This tree grows to a height of 30 feet with a crown spread of 15-20 feet. It has been widely planted in gardens and public parks in Canberra and appears to be well suited to the climate and soils. The tree has an upright form in the young stages but a more round-headed crown develops with age.

Claret Ash originated in Australia by chance, as a seedling amongst other ash plants being raised in a South Australian nursery. All the plants now growing have been raised vegetatively by budding, generally using *F. oxycarpa* as rootstock. Any variation which appears is due to soil type, the effect of the rootstock, or the amount of summer watering.

Deep well drained soils and additional summer watering ensure rapid growth. Care should be taken to ensure that the soil does not become waterlogged in winter. Trees growing in unwatered areas develop colour early in autumn but the display is not as long lasting as that which can be seen later in the season on trees grown under garden conditions.

Claret Ash is free of disease and insect pests.

The flowers, which occur rarely, are inconspicuous. The main feature of the tree is its richly coloured foliage in autumn. A few trees in Canberra have produced viable seed but these are rare.

It has been widely planted in Canberra and can be seen in Bougainville Street, Manuka; Bremer Street, Griffith; Tasmania Circle, Forrest, and Masson Street, Turner, as well as in many home gardens.





**BETULA PENDULA**

## Silver Birch

This species known also as *B. alba* or *B. verrusoca* is one of the most beautiful trees in Canberra gardens. It grows well under local conditions eventually reaching a height of 40-50 feet, and is a native of Europe and Asia.

One of the main features of Silver Birch is its striking white bark which peels off in small thin flakes. As the tree becomes older the bark on the lower trunk becomes grey and corky but the upper stem and young branches are always white giving the tree a most attractive appearance in winter.

Silver Birch is deciduous and its leaves turn bright yellow before falling in autumn. In spring the new leaves are a soft green and are closely followed by the flowers or catkins—1 in to 1½ in in length—which hang like small pendant candles from the branches. The wood is strong and is not liable to wind break.

The beauty of Silver Birch lies in its natural shape. Pruning should be carried out with care and restricted to the removal of small branches, and then only when absolutely necessary. The main leader should never be lopped or cut back as, not only does this ruin the natural shape, but may result in severe dieback. The tree does not shoot readily.

Under local conditions Silver Birch is free of most insect and fungal pests and does not require spraying. Christmas Beetles may cause leaf damage in some seasons but this does not usually warrant treatment. Care should be taken not to plant in areas where waterlogging may occur in winter. Apart from this precaution Silver Birch is hardy.

Silver Birch responds to summer watering and fertilising and grows rapidly when young, often 5-6 feet a year.

Propagation is by seed collected in autumn and either sown immediately or stored while moist in a refrigerator for the winter before sowing in spring.

Many fine examples of Silver Birch can be seen in home gardens and public parks in Canberra, and as a street tree in Mitchell Street, Griffith, and Johnston Street, Narrabundah.





**PISTACIA SINENSIS**

## Chinese Pistache

A relatively new introduction to Canberra, Pistache grows extremely well, is relatively drought hardy, and free of disease and insect pests.

Its main feature is the beauty of the autumn foliage which should earn a place in any home garden.

*Pistacia sinensis* is native to China and is related to *P. vera*, which is grown widely in Mediterranean regions for the delicacy, pistachio nuts. The fruit of *P. sinensis* is edible but small.

Pistache is a small deciduous tree growing to a height of 20-30 feet with a spread of 15 feet. The leaves are about 9 inches long and divided into ten or twelve slender pointed leaflets called pinnae. They are bright glossy green in summer and before falling in autumn turn brilliant red, orange or crimson.

The trees are either male or female. Only the female produces bunches of red or purple berries late in autumn. These add to the beauty of the tree.

Propagation is usually from seed, although trials are now being carried out to raise the best autumn leaf colour types by budding, grafting or from cuttings.

In appearance Pistache resembles *Toxicodendron succedanea* (*Rhus succedanea*) which has been grown widely for the beauty of the autumn foliage. Unfortunately many people are allergic to this tree, which can cause a severe rash. Pistache has all the beauty of *Rhus* and should be used as an alternative.

It is a very shapely tree and needs little attention. Any pruning which is required should be carried out in winter.

The young bark when bruised is distinctively aromatic.

The best examples of the species can be seen in Robe Street, Deakin, Irwin Street, Yarralumla.





## SOPHORA JAPONICA

### Japanese Pagoda Tree

The Japanese Pagoda tree is a hardy deciduous species that grows to 40 feet, with a wide crown spread. Its dark green leaves divide into a number of leaflets and give a fine shade pattern. The tree is useful as a shade tree, particularly for planting near terraces.

Its branches and young stems are dark green and still attractive in winter when the tree is leafless.

Cream to white pea-shaped flowers appear in late summer and are borne on the current season's growth. The flowers develop into pods which are translucent and glutinous. The fruit may occasionally cause a nuisance when falling on to paths or paved areas.

The leaves turn a clear yellow in autumn and often persist well into late autumn before falling.

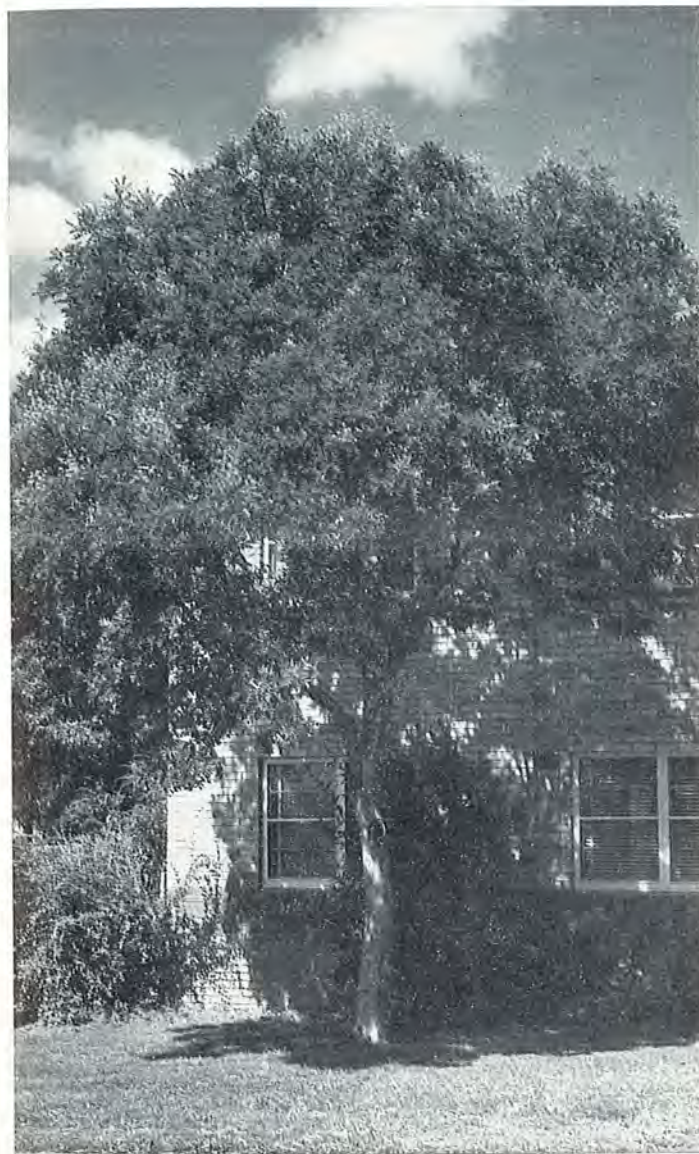
Pagoda Tree resembles *Robinia*, the well known Black Locust, but is more suitable for the home garden. It is thornless and does not sucker from the roots.

*Sophora* is propagated from freely germinating seed. Young plants grow rapidly and result in an attractive, well grown tree in a few years.

*Sophora japonica* grows well under Canberra conditions and is very useful in positions where a medium sized dark green-leaved deciduous shade tree is required.

It is free of insect or fungal pests. Young trees may be slightly frost tender when small, but the tree is rarely killed by frost and new shoots grow rapidly in spring. Frost damage is not a problem after the tree matures.

*Sophora japonica* has been planted in a number of streets in Canberra. Good examples can be seen in Cairns Street, Deakin, the north side of Bentham Street, Yarralumla, and McPherson and Robinson Streets, O'Connor.





## WHERE TO SEE THEM

**Prunus cerasifera 'Nigra'** Single Flowering Plum  
Flinders Way, Griffith  
Banks Street, Yarralumla

**Albizia julibrissin** Silk Tree  
Green Square, Kingston  
Griffith Shops park  
Institute of Anatomy Courtyard

**Eucalyptus cinerea** Argyle Apple  
Henty Street, Braddon  
McArthur Avenue, O'Connor

**Liquidamber styraciflua** Sweet Gum  
Bougainville Street, Manuka  
Knibbs Street, Turner  
Cunningham Street, Kingston  
Angas Street, Ainslie  
Parkes Way

**Cupressus sempervirens var. 'Stricta'** Roman Cypress  
City Hill  
Drake Street, Ainslie

**Acer negundo** Box Elder  
Bannister Gardens, Griffith  
Hannan Crescent, Ainslie

**Fraxinus sp. 'Raywoodii'** Claret Ash  
Bougainville Street, Manuka  
Bremer Street, Griffith  
Hobart Place, Forrest  
Masson Street, Turner

**Betula pendula** Silver Birch  
Mitchell Street, Griffith  
Johnston Street, Narrabundah

**Pistacia sinensis** Chinese Pistache  
Robe Street, Deakin  
Irwin Street, Yarralumla

**Sophora japonica** Japanese Pagoda Tree  
Cairns Street, Deakin  
Robinson Street, O'Connor  
Wedge Street, Turner