

There's a tree for everyone in this world

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Vikings believed the great tree that encompassed Creation would shake precariously at the end of the world. It seems wobbly right now. We are in the middle of a climate crisis caused partly by deforestation.

Preserving and increasing tree cover is part of the solution. Anyone with a garden or patch of land can participate. There are numerous tree planting campaigns, led in the UK by the Queen's Green Canopy initiative highlighted previously in House & Home.

I may get my chance to join in sooner than I expected. The old apple tree at the end of our garden is still growing and crops heavily every second or third year. But the heartwood is rotting. The elegant, curved trunk is splaying open.

Me and my flipping apple tree. Whenever strong winds whistle round the house at night I wake up and worry it has blown over. On calm nights, I sleep like a baby while swaths of Amazonian and Indonesian rainforests go up in smoke.

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I once wrote an article with the working title "Why visit Nottinghamshire?" Residents of that fine county should know this was not intended ironically. The commissioning editor was a kind man, but urban in outlook. He struggled with my pitch.

The conversation went like this: Trees are like people. It is easier to care about ones we know than ones we don't Gardens 'There's a tree for everyone in this world' From tiny seedlings to great oaks, they can lift our spirits. Plant them, climb them, bathe with them "You think readers should visit Nottinghamshire to look at a tree?" "The Major Oak isn't any tree," I said, "Robin Hood supposedly hid in it." "Ah, a celebrity angle?" he replied, brightening. "Well," I said, "The tree is so old they've had to prop it up. But the Robin Hood myth has even older roots" "So, to summarise: our readers, many of whom live overseas, should travel thousands of miles to see an old tree that's falling down and which isn't genuinely associated with anyone famous." "Yes." "But you're also reviewing a Michelin-starred restaurant in Nottingham for the piece?" "Yes." "So maybe focus on that?" I did not see what the issue was. I once trekked all day through a rainforest to see a magnificent kapok tree which my welly-clad Kichwa guide was immensely proud of.

I'm hoping to visit 4,000-year-old bristlecone pines in California if I can do a deal with my conscience on carbon offsets. Closer to home, fruit trees are a good choice for garden planting, says Elisabeth Larsen of the Royal Horticultural Society. They do not grow too big. And wildlife enjoy the fruit. That is just as well. The birds and insects will get to it faster than you can. Mature fruit trees can be good for kids to climb, with health and safety caveats. I tumbled from the low branches of a crab apple tree on to my head when I was eight and it made me the man I am today. Kevin Martin credits similar transformational properties to Kew Gardens' great chestnut-leaved oak.

He fell in love with it as a rookie arboriculturist. He is now head of Kew's tree collection. Plant your chosen sapling in shallow, square hole, he advises. That will help its roots spread. Consider growing conditions more carefully than I did when I planted a rowan in hot, dry Kent.

The struggling rowan has however fulfilled its traditional Scottish role of keeping witches away, while producing enough orange berries to attract redwings. Trees lift the spirits. They are particularly restorative in spring when deciduous species are blossoming and coming into leaf. Enjoying autumn foliage is a more reflective pleasure. Vermont in the US and Hokkaido in Japan are good spots. So are Central Park in New York, Ueno Park in Tokyo and Hampstead Heath in London. Last weekend, I experimented with “forest bathing”, as contemplative woodland walks are called in Japan. I took along three professional sceptics. “You have to encircle the tree, sigh deeply and be at one with it,” I explained, reading from a New Age blog. “I’m not sure this is the tree for me,” said the senior scientist. “There’s a tree for everyone in this world,” I told him reassuringly. “Same problem here,” said the City lawyer, “my tree reminds me of a client who never replies to my emails.” “This is actually going pretty well,” said the other senior scientist, pressing her ear to the trunk, “You can hear the branches flexing in the wind. It’s like the tree is talking to me.” We had some difficulty unpeeling her when it was time to go to the pub, inevitably a Royal Oak.

My tree kept shtum. If it could have spoken, I doubt it would have said “harmonise with the cosmos” as a serious tree-hugger would hope. I imagine it would have been fabulously ticked off. It would have shouted: “What is the matter with you people? Why do you keep cutting us down? Plant some more of us! Stop making excuses!” If the gales topple my apple tree, I will plant a seedling grown from a pip.

Hopefully this will still be bursting into flower, leaf and fruit decades after I have gone — and we have stalled global warming.

Source: <https://www.ft.com/content/bc4ade1b-cbf3-423f-a06e-c7d5963a711e>