

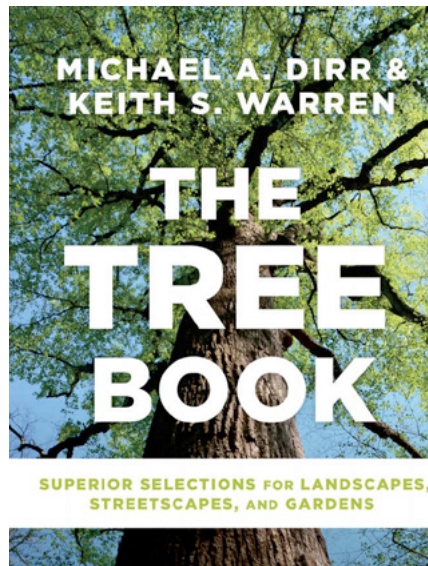
## **The Tree Book: Superior Selections for Landscapes, Streetscapes, and Gardens**

Michael A. Dirr and Keith S. Warren  
Timber Press. 2019

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In truth this book should really be called the Big Tree Book for it is an enormous tome, comprising 939 A4 pages. It is certainly not a suitable or comfortable read in bed! *The Tree Book* is the go-to reference for more than 2,400 species and cultivars, from two of the biggest names in American horticulture – Michael A. Dirr, professor emeritus, horticulture, University of Georgia, who is widely acknowledged as one of the leading experts on trees and shrubs for landscapes and gardens, and Keith S. Warren, tree breeder and nurseryman, who has significantly reshaped the tree palette of the American landscape through the introduction and promotion of improved tree cultivars. From two of the foremost names in horticulture, comes the authoritative guide for the best tree species and cultivars for the diverse landscapes of today. The featured trees include those widely available in the nursery trade, some new and promising choices, and a selection of over-looked options that deserve renewed interest. Each tree profile includes the common and the botanical name along with details on: foliage; flowers, seeds, fruits, and cones; native range; adaptability; and

popular uses in landscapes. *The Tree Book* is a must-have resource for landscape architects, foresters, horticulturists, enthusiastic home gardeners and students in related fields.

Whilst being based in the USA, the authors point out that they have picked “trees that make up the currently available landscape tree palette for use in the temperate northern hemisphere...The best cultivars have spread across continents, and this book should be useful in all countries across temperate climates.” Here in Ireland, we depend to a huge extent on trees from the USA, hence the relevance of this book.

The authors argue that the advance of our civilisation has been largely underpinned by a process of turning the wild environment into what is now called the “built environment”. We have to admit that our apparent conquest of nature has given us tremendous creature comforts... but all this comes at a price, they argue. While we have urbanised our world, we still need to cherish nature and accept that we are ultimately subservient to it. While conquest has almost always been destructive, the authors argue that populations prosper best in climates where trees are present.

Research at Yale (2015)<sup>1</sup> estimated that the Earth holds six trillion trees, but the study also found that there has been a 46% loss of tree cover since the dawn of civilisation and that humans are the main drivers of that reduction. We need only look at the recent illegal forest fires in the Amazon to realise that humans continue to reduce the tree cover in order to provide more space for agriculture. Clearly, widespread reforestation is good for the planet but what we do for our cities is disproportionately important. Planting trees in human population zones, especially in cities, has a multiplier effect on its benefits. Urban and residential trees mitigate so many human-caused effects on the environment.

Trees, the authors say, benefit people psychologically too, in subtle ways that often go unnoticed. The presence of trees, the merest hint of a natural environment, somehow reduces stress, and stress reduction in turn improves health.

This comprehensive guide will appeal to professionals at the forefront of discussions around public green spaces, environmental justice, and urban planning in the age of rapid urbanisation and global warming, all subjects that Irish foresters will have to consider. With the advance of climate change this book is hugely relevant. It features 2,745 superb colour photographs, making tree identification much easier than it has been previously. The writing style is entertaining and compelling with its lively stylistic mix of technical, impressionistic, and, occasionally, irreverent approaches to tree selection.

Nowhere else can you get all this information in one place, a modern-day classic for tree lovers – professional or otherwise.

*John Mc Loughlin*

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<sup>1</sup> Crowther, T., Glick, H., Covey, K. et al. 2015. Mapping tree density at a global scale. *Nature* 525: 201–205.