

Trees That Produce Minimal Litter

What is a messy tree? Trees that drop large or thick leaves, twigs, flowers, fruit, seeds and nuts might be considered ‘messy.’ However, each of these ‘messes’ performs a function contributing to survival or reproduction. Many people value these features and enjoy them as part of the beauty of the tree. Wildlife often live from these features! Many plants today are bred to be sterile, with no fruit or pollen and thus have minimal tree ‘litter.’ Female trees can produce large fleshy fruits that some people consider ‘messy.’ As a homeowner you may be concerned with tree litter clogging gutters, falling on cars, drive-ways, walkways, patios or decks. The list below is not all inclusive, but meant to be a starting point on identifying trees with minimal litter potential.



Spruce have cones that can become litter, but usually these are a minor nuisance.



Pine trees have minimal litter and make a good permanent addition to the landscape.

Compiled by Barb Kirkpatrick, Ramsey County Master Gardener. Barb has served for 10 years as a Master Gardener and Tree Care Advisor in Ramsey County and has a special interest in trees. In both of these roles, Barb has helped many people with their tree questions, and believes that each tree has its merits.

Botanical Name	Common Name	Height	Comments
<i>Abies</i> spp.	fir	40-60'	Korean, Canaan, balsam, Fraser, white.
<i>Acer negundo</i>	boxelder	40-60'	'Baron' is recommended.; use only male forms.
<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>	blue beech	20-30'	Good native small tree.
<i>Fraxinus americana</i>	white ash	50+	'Northern Blaze' is recommended; use only male forms.
<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>	green ash	40-60'	Select seedless forms: 'Marshall Seedless', 'Bergeson', Kindred', 'Wahpeton.'
<i>Gleditsia triacanthos inermis</i>	honeylocust	30-60'	Minimal raking; select a thornless/fruitless form.
<i>Larix laricina</i>	tamarack	40-70'	Deciduous conifer; yellow fall color.
<i>Malus</i> hybrids	crabapple	15-25'	Select persistent fruit or fruitless (e.g., 'Spring Snow') forms.
<i>Ostrya virginiana</i>	ironwood	25-40'	Good native small tree.
<i>Picea</i> spp.	spruce	25-50+	Black, white, Norway, Serbian.
<i>Pinus</i> spp.	pine	25-50+	White (mature trees do have large cones), Austrian, Scots, Norway, Swiss stone, mugo.
<i>Populus deltoides</i> 'Siouxland'	cottonless cottonwood	80-100'	South Dakota selection; adapted to poor soil, grows quickly.
<i>Populus</i> hybrids	seedless poplar	40-60'	Good selections are: 'Prairie Sky,' 'Robusta,' 'Tower,' 'Highland'
<i>Populus x acuminata</i>	lanceleaf cottonwood	40-60'	Hardy; upright seedless pyramidal tree.
<i>Prunus</i> hybrids	cherry	15-25'	Select fruitless varieties.
<i>Prunus x nigrella</i> 'Muckle'	muckle plum	10-15'	Sterile hybrid, thus no fruit; red buds and showy pink flowers; red fall color.
<i>Syringa reticulata</i>	Japanese tree lilac	15-25'	Nice bark, flowers and form.
<i>Thuja occidentalis</i> & cultivars	arborvitae	25-50'	Wide variety of forms and height from cultivars.
<i>Tilia cordata</i>	littleleaf linden	25-50'	Conical form, fragrant flowers, <i>T. americana</i> has larger leaves and multiple stems