

My favourite tree

You won't find my tree easily. It doesn't look likely to be anybody's favourite tree. It is tucked in the hedgerow of a field on Silverton Lane, overshadowed by surrounding bigger trees. I look at it occasionally to check that it is thriving, because it is my tree and my responsibility. After all, I brought it into this world and I caused its travels. It is a Colorado blue spruce.



My tree interests began when we moved to a house with a one-acre garden in the countryside a few miles from Canterbury. As a house-warming present, our daughter bought us a monkey puzzle tree, Araucaria, also the name of the composer of my favourite crosswords, as she knew very well. Watching it grow (and boy, did it grow!) in its generous space, I first realised the pleasure that planting trees can provide. With ample grassland to go at, I started adding to the trees that were already there: a British native whitebeam, a coastal redwood (sequoia) sapling, imported (illegally?) after a visit to California, and others.

Then, from a visit to Denver (Colorado), my wife, Pat, brought back some seeds of the Colorado blue spruce. I planted them in a pot and, of the ones that germinated, this is the survivor. It is slow growing and was still too small to plant in the garden when we moved to Northumberland. So it came with us and eventually was ready to plant out. But our garden here is not suitable for large trees, and that is what it was bound to become eventually. Fortunately, our neighbour John Wallace (now unfortunately deceased) was the part owner of the field along the road. He was willing to provide a nursery for my baby, as long as it was planted in the region of the hedge he was gradually developing down the roadside. And so, twenty or so years on from our Denver trip, there it stands, looking completely at home in the snow.

Taking this photograph reminded me that it is time to carry out the duties of a guardian, trimming the surrounding and faster growing trees to ensure that they do not overwhelm it. Nurturing the trees is a responsibility we all share. For me, it is a labour of love.

John Lewis
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