

Down to EARTH



How to plant ornamental trees for a trail, says NEIL WORMALD

Check whether its location will be sunny or shady and the soil, then pick a variety to suit.

For foundations, calculate 1½ times the height of the tree and dig that distance away from the trunk. Dig a planting hole at least 6in wider and 12in deep. Spike the base and sides of the hole with the bottom with fresh compost. Give the tree a good watering and then remove from its pot. Gently shake the roots from the rootball, and then position the tree in the hole so that the tree will be buried to the same depth as in its original container.

Mix the planting compost into the excavated soil and add a slow-release fertiliser. Use this mixture to fill the hole, firming it in as you do so. Water the tree in the hole and mulch the ground next to the rootball at a 45-degree angle. Secure the tree to the stake with a strap that is loose enough to allow some outward movement. Lay a 2in mulch of bark chippings. Keep the soil moist and remove all weeds.

Q AND ANSWERS

Q Which orchids will thrive in a cool bedroom?

A Poole, Solihull

Q As long as the room is well lit, cymbidium orchids will grow happily. Simply keep the compost moist, mist the leaves occasionally and ensure they are not exposed to draughts.

Q Send your questions to Down to Earth, The Sunday Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E98 1ST; or e-mail: style.letters@sunday-times.co.uk

A According to the garden designer Roberto Silva, the owner of the large rectangular garden that he designed in Putney, southwest London, has "a very bold personality" (he says this with affection).

Silva himself is Brazilian, a nationality not known for its reticence, although, at first glance, the garden's disciplined planting, colour palette, Welsh stone and Japanese cherry tree offer few indications of its South American influences. But it is the strong abstract design that gives it away: it is unmistakably inspired by the work of the late Roberto Burle Marx, a Brazilian artist and landscape designer with an international reputation.

The central feature of Silva's scheme is a sweeping, inverted "S" that travels the length of the garden as an undulating dry-stone wall, with lawn to one side and honey-coloured gravel onto the other. "I wanted something with an immediate and strong visual impact," he says. "It's quite a big garden, but I didn't want to divide it into rooms as so many people do."

The slate wall owes as much to the contemporary British sculptor Andy Goldsworthy as to works by Burle Marx, and such was Silva's attention to detail that he had it demolished twice while partially built before he finally decided it was right. Luckily, both the budget and the builders were accommodating.

The garden's water feature, which looks like a rock formation, harmonises with the wall. Silva bored holes through the rocks and attached a pump system to create a larger version of the pebble

fountains that you find in garden centres.

The key to the garden is its practicality. The wall, for example, has many functions. "Kids run along it, dogs jump over it, it's a seat, we lie on it in the sun — it's not just a showpiece," says the owner. The decked area, beyond the central flowering cherry and the fountain, is made of high-quality hardwood and is hemmed in by the final sweep of the wall. As well as being a space for sitting, eating and entertaining, it is used as a stage for live music at parties — there are electrical sockets safely hidden among the rocks.

The planting is designed for modern massed-foliage effects and shape. Plants include cut-leaved *Rhus typhina*, various acers, tree ferns, eucalyptus, ligularia (unfortunately extremely susceptible to slugs) and phormiums. It is enlivened by dramatic splashes of colour: Silva is particularly pleased with the show this year from that late-summer stalwart, brilliant red *Crocosmia 'Lucifer'*, and by a highly contemporary combination at the end of the garden: the tufty grass *Stipa gigantea* with the leggy, purple and translucent *Verbena bonariensis*.

Burle Marx approached his gardens and landscapes as an abstract painter might a canvas. It is fashionable for designers around the world to claim to use his influence, but it takes a native Brazilian such as Silva to pull it off with such aplomb.

To commission Roberto Silva or for more information, call 020 7976 6730

BOULDER AND

Inspired by abstract art, Roberto Silva uses dry-stone walls to create dramatic shapes in the garden. **TIM RICHARDSON reports**



FLORIBUNDA

Pebble dash: a dry-stone wall snakes through the garden, separating grass and gravel. Below left, tufty grasses give a modern look. Right, the stone water feature

BRIGHTER

