

# JAPANESE MAPLES

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Japanese maples are some of the most popular smaller trees and shrubs in the landscape today. Some people believe that Japanese Maple refers to just the little lace-leaf shrub common to the garden, but actually Japanese Maple refers to any of the *Acer palmatum*, *Acer japonicum*, or *Acer shirasawanum* cultivars (most are *Acer palmatum* cultivars). Sizes range anywhere from a shrubs a few feet tall to 30' tall trees. No matter the size, Japanese Maples as a group will add grace and refinement to almost any garden. Their fall color is probably the best of any plant you are likely to find, with varying shades of bright red, yellow, and orange being displayed among the varieties. Older trees will usually take on picturesque forms, with each tree having its own unique character.

## General Planting and Care Considerations

- The Moisture Issue.** Japanese Maples do not like wet feet. One of the primary factors in the failure of Japanese Maples is too much moisture. Too much moisture can cause lead to root death and root rot, and open the door for all sorts of fungal and bacterial infections. Japanese Maples in particular are very susceptible to Phytophthora root rot infections and vascular diseases like Verticillium, partly because of their branching structure. Before *planting a Japanese Maple, ensure that your soil drains well.* Look out for wet areas or areas that get constant heavy irrigation. If your soil is not well-drained, you will want to mound the soil up or plant in a raised bed or berm to keep the main roots out of the water.
- Heat Considerations.** Japanese Maples will generally do okay in sun, although most *prefer* part shade in the hotter part of the day. None of them will take reflected heat, as this will burn the tender bark. Any time you have a non-green leaf, like red or golden, it will be much more susceptible to sunburn, and should definitely be given part shade. Light colored bark and reflected heat are a dangerous combination. The Coral Bark Maple, and some of the fairer-barked trees will develop bark scald and start to split open. Lack of adequate summer water will also contribute greatly to leaf and bark burning, so basically they can take a bit more sun if properly irrigated. In doubt, just find a spot with part shade.
- Remember to Water Well.** Water well for the first few years at least. Japanese Maples certainly don't like to sit in standing water, but that doesn't mean that you don't need to water adequately in the summer. Proper irrigation will mitigate many heat issues, and will keep your tree looking nice through the summer. Young trees will usually experience a certain amount of leaf burn for the first year or two during the heat of summer. This usually stops once the plant is established, assuming that the location is not just too hot for the tree. Also, avoid overhead watering. The tender foliage is very susceptible to burning, and water droplets sitting on the foliage can leave behind burn marks (they act like a magnifying glass in the sun). Soaker hoses are preferred, and should be used to water the soil surrounding the tree (and any rootball or soil that came with the tree).
- Fertilizer.** Japanese Maples are not heavy nutrient gobblers by nature, and care should be exercised when applying fertilizer. Too much nitrogen can make them go haywire and put on rampant growth that comes at the expense of the tree's form and possible later health (it can encourage disease progression later on). Use lower nitrogen organics when possible, and use them sparingly. Stay away from high-nitrogen synthetic fertilizers as much as possible.
- Pruning.** Japanese Maples really don't usually *need* to be pruned in general, but you can sometimes improve the form through selective pruning. Pruning Japanese Maples is somewhat of an art form, but the general rules are to remove dead, weak, or crossing branches to thin and open up the tree and highlight the branch structures. This is always best done in late fall or winter.
- Varieties, Varieties, Varieties.** The choices can simply be overwhelming, and entire books have been written on the subject of Japanese Maple cultivars. Most of the difference though is in height or foliage color, with the underlying needs remaining the same. To help you through it, the back page lists some of the more common, tried-and-true varieties that we carry.

## Upright Japanese Maples

- **Acer palmatum** (*Green Japanese Maple*)  
The standard green Japanese maple, excellent upright form, with light green leaves that turn shades of yellow, orange and bronze-red in fall. 30'+
- **Acer palmatum 'Bloodgood'**  
Vigorous upright habit, large deeply cut red leaves which turn to a brighter red in fall. Strong growing to 20 x 20'.
- **Acer palmatum 'Bonfire' ('Akaji nishiki', 'Seigai')**  
Small upright tree. Glossy leaves emerge bright red and fade to green. Nice multicolor effect all summer. Brilliant red in fall. Dense growth to 10'.
- **Acer palmatum 'Butterfly' ('Kocho nishiki', 'Kocho no mai')**  
Upright form with small green leaves edged by white and soft pink. Margins turn brighter pink in autumn. Small tree to 12'.
- **Acer palmatum 'Emperor I' ('Red Emperor')**  
Upright maple, similar to *'Bloodgood'*. Dark red-purple leaves turn scarlet in fall. 15 x 15'
- **Acer palmatum 'Fireglow' ('Effigi')**  
Upright maple, similar to *'Bloodgood'* but slightly more pink and with brighter red fall coloration. 12'
- **Acer palmatum 'Kamagata' *Eagle Claw Maple***  
Small leaves with long angular lobes emerge with a red margin on a light green leaf. Mid-summer color is bright green before turning intense orange and yellow in fall. Slow grower with soft appearance. Dwarf dense habit to 10'.
- **Acer palmatum 'Sango kaku' ('Senkaki', "Coral Tower") *Coral Bark Maple***  
Best known for its magnificent coral-pink bark in the winter. An upright grower with medium sized mid-green leaves until fall when they turn a beautiful gold to apricot-orange. Very showy tree with a nice upright form to 25 x 20'.
- **Acer palmatum dissectum 'Seiryu' ("Blue-green Dragon")**  
Technically part of the laceleaf "dissectum" group, but the upright growth habit sets it apart from others. A very attractive upright growth form with small, lacy green leaves until autumn when leaves turn red and gold with tones of purple. 25' x 15'.
- **Acer palmatum 'Shaina'**  
A popular compact tree with small, deeply cut leaves that remain close to branches. Leaves begin a bright red and mature to a deep reddish-purple and magenta in fall. Upright and densely branching to 8 x 8'.
- **Acer palmatum 'Shishigashira' ('Ribescifolium', 'Mejishi') *Lion's Head Maple***  
Small bright green leaves curl tightly against branches. Densely packed leaves create a striking appearance on the dwarf, upright tree which turns brilliant gold with some red/pink shades in autumn. Slow growing to 15'x10'.

## Laceleaf Japanese Maples

- **Acer palmatum dissectum 'Crimson Queen'**  
A lovely lace leaf maple with deep purple-red color and a nice cascading habit. Holds color well in heat and turns deep scarlet in fall. 6 x 8'
- **Acer palmatum dissectum 'Garnet'**  
Deep red leaves, weeping spreading habit. Bright red in fall. One of the faster and larger growers, to 12'x12'.
- **Acer palmatum dissectum 'Red Dragon'** □  
A beautiful weeping laceleaf with new red leaves which mature to purple-red. Rich red in fall. 10 x 10'
- **Acer palmatum dissectum 'Toyama nishiki'**  
Very unusual coloration that varies from purple to red to green with many streaks of white all on the same leaf. Fall color includes gold, bronze, red and purple. Slow growing mounding habit to 5-10', may sunburn.
- **Acer palmatum dissectum 'Viridis'** □  
The most common laceleaf maple with bright green leaves. Turns yellow-gold with hints of orange and red in autumn. Cascading habit to 10 x 10'.

## Other Japanese Maples

- **Acer japonicum 'Aconitifolium' ('Maiku jaku', "Dancing Peacock") *Fern-leaf Full Moon Maple***  
Upright yet bushy habit, with large rounded, fernlike, rich green leaves that turn scarlet in fall. 15 x 15'
- **Acer shirasawanum 'Aureum' *Golden Full Moon Maple***  
Beautiful tree with bright yellow leaves. In shade, the leaves will be more chartreuse, then orange-red in fall. Upright and bushy growth to 20 x 15'.
- **Acer shirasawanum 'Autumn Moon'**  
Similar to *'Aureum'* in leaf shape and habit but the leaves are tinged with bronzy-orange becoming more prominently orange-red in fall. 20 x 15'