



Japanese maples are some of the most beautiful and useful trees and shrubs for landscaping. Their diversity of size, color and form is so wide, they will fit in almost any garden. They have spectacular structure and character, and excellent fall color, ranging from bright gold to crimson. All make gorgeous specimens.

Although there are many species of maples from Japan and other parts of Asia, we commonly use the term “Japanese maple” to refer to three species of cultivated maples: *Acer palmatum*, *Acer japonicum*, and *Acer shirasawanum*. *Acer pseudosieboldianum* is similar in appearance to Japanese maples, but this species is commonly called “Korean Maple”.

Varieties of Japanese Maples

Acer palmatum

Acer palmatum and its hundreds of cultivated varieties are the typical Japanese maple that most people are familiar with. All varieties originated as natural variations of the parent, *A. palmatum*, and have been cultivated, bred, and selected for hundreds of years. Although Japanese maples often re-seed, the seedlings are quite variable, and may not look anything like the parent plant. Japanese maples are therefore reproduced through cuttings, typically grafted to *A. palmatum* rootstock.

The ***palmatum*** group has moderately divided leaves. These maples are slow to moderate growing (12-24 inches per year or more) to approximately 20 ft tall. Most *palmatum*s can adapt to full sun in our area, but expect scorching of leaves on the top and southwestern sides of trees for the first 5-7 years.

Notable varieties:

Osakazuki – upright and spreading at maturity, to 20 ft. Stunning red fall color.

Twombly’s Red Sentinel – vertical, columnar form to 20 ft. Burgundy-red foliage spring-fall

Mikawa yatsubusa – Sculptural form to 7 ft. Foliage covers branches densely.

Fireglow – Upright, rounded form to 15 ft. Red foliage spring-fall.

Cultivars in the ***dissectum*** group, commonly called lace-leaf maples, have leaves that are very deeply divided and dissected into lobes. They are very slow growing (6-12 inches per year), and tend to be smaller at maturity than the *palmatum* group. *Dissectum*s will never adapt to full inland sun without burning. Give them afternoon shade if you live in a hot summer area.

Notable varieties:

Viridis – Weeping habit to 12 ft. Green foliage spring and summer, gold & red in fall.

Crimson Queen – Weeping habit to 7 ft tall. Burgundy leaves turn red in fall.

Seiryu – Upright habit to 10-15 ft. Great fall color.

Acer japonicum & Acer shirasawanum

Called Full-Moon maples, *japonicum*s have large, bold leaves, prominent spring blooms, and intense fall color. They have sturdy structure with a rounded shape and are slow growing to about 20 ft. *Japonicum*s cannot tolerate full sun inland, and will always scorch without afternoon shade.

Notable varieties

Acer japonicum 'Vitifolium' – Grape-Leaf maple has shallowly divided leaves

Acer japonicum 'Aconitifolium' – Fern-Leaf maple has deeply divided and dissected leaves

Acer shirasawanum 'Aureum' – Golden Full-Moon Maple

Care of Japanese Maples:

1. **Planting** - Japanese maples like well-drained soil. To determine whether your soil has adequate drainage, dig your hole, fill it with water, and check it in 30 minutes. If there is still water in the bottom of the hole, you need to dig down another 16 inches. Fill the bottom 12 inches of the deeper hole with gravel, then add 4 inches of soil on top of that. The excess water will stay in the gravel, and not in the root zone of the tree.
2. **Feeding** - Orchard Recommends Happy Frog Japanese maple fertilizer monthly from March through November. Follow the directions on the label.
3. **Reducing scorch** – We recommend using Pro-tekt, which adds silicon to the cell structure of the tree, making leaves more resistant to scorching. Apply when buds begin to swell and repeat weekly until the tree is fully leafed out. After leaves have fully emerged it's too late to use this product.
4. **Watering**- Japanese maples require more water than other trees. They have a shallow, fibrous root system so pop up or spray emitters are better than drip for maples. If you have an existing drip line, add Micro-sprays around the maple to get adequate water to the root zone. Be sure to aim the water so it doesn't hit the trunk of the tree.
5. **Pruning**- Japanese maples are best pruned when they are dormant. Use thinning cuts, allowing air and light circulation throughout the tree. You can keep your tree to a manageable size by removing the larger branches at a crotch and tipping back the smaller branches that are left on the tree. This method shows off the structure of the branches. Japanese maples should never be topped or sheared. Always prune selectively.

Potential Problems:

1. **Sunburn** – In addition to scorching of leaves, Japanese maples can get sunburn on the bark of the tree if exposed to full afternoon sun in hot inland areas. When pruning a tree keep this in mind. The bark of a sunburned tree will get corky and sunken, peeling away to expose the tissue underneath. If you notice your tree exhibiting signs of sunken corky bark, paint the tree with white indoor latex paint diluted 50% with water. White paint reflects the sunlight to preserve the tissue of the bark.
2. **Verticillium wilt** – The number one cause of death for Japanese maples is a fungus called Verticillium wilt. Verticillium is a soil-borne fungus that attacks Japanese maples and restricts the cells from bringing nutrients and sugars from the roots to the foliage. One or more branches at a time will suddenly die back, with leaves turning brown and dying. The bark on dead branches turns black. To help diagnose verticillium, take a branch that has turned black and cut it lengthwise in half. There will be brown streaking through the center of the branch. There is no chemical control for verticillium wilt. If caught early, fertilize heavily to help the tree try to grow out of the disease. If you plant again in that area, make sure to consult a list for verticillium resistant plants.
3. **Aphids** – An annoying but mostly harmless problem on maples, aphids are easy to kill but quick to reproduce. Control them with PestFighter Year-Round Spray Oil or Takedown Garden Spray. If you see black and brown soldier beetles around your tree in spring, don't spray. Soldier beetles and their larvae are voracious predators of aphids, and will take care of the problem for you.