

Success with Japanese Maples

Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*, *Acer japonicum*, and *Acer shirasawanum*) are some of the most delightful and versatile small trees for the garden. They vary in size, from dwarfs that are suitable for very small spaces or containers, to trees that will reach more than 20' in height and width in 20-30 years. Their leaves vary in shape and color, and many change color throughout the growing season. Some cultivars have spectacular spring foliage color, rivaling flowering trees for beauty; others are known for their brilliant fall colors. There are hundreds of named Japanese maple cultivars, in addition to seedling trees of three species.



Acer palmatum 'Ukigumo' the Floating Cloud Maple

In addition to the wonderful selections of Japanese maples available, there are several good selections of their close cousin, our native maple, *Acer circinatum*, that are similar in culture in the garden.



Acer palmatum 'Murasaki Kiyohime' new spring growth

Growing Japanese Maples

All Japanese maples do best in rich, moist, well-drained soil. If your soil is very well-drained and sandy, you should amend the planting area with organic matter, such as fine bark and good compost. Heavy soil can be mounded to provide better drainage if necessary. Amend heavy soil with fine bark to improve soil structure. Always mulch the roots to maintain summer soil moisture and to keep the soil cool.

Japanese maples prefer even soil moisture. Plan to irrigate

during summer dry periods, especially the first few years, and during extended dry periods. The soil needs to be neither wet, nor dry.

Do not over-fertilize. We recommend very light feedings of all-purpose or acid plant food once in mid-Spring. Heavy feeding or late summer feeding can lead to rank, tender growth that is more susceptible to disease.

Many Japanese maples do fine in full sun, but do not like reflected heat. All will do well in partial to full shade, though in deep shade, red summer foliage may fade, and fall foliage tones may be more muted. Variegated leaf maples prefer afternoon shade.

Disease Prevention

Watch for aphids in late spring and early summer. They can be washed off with a strong jet of water, or you can spray insecticidal soap. Japanese maples can be susceptible to *Pseudomonas* bacterial canker. This disease enters tender or damaged tissue and causes twig and branch die-back. It can be prevented by planting the trees where they are not subject to hard early freezes in fall or hard late spring frosts, and avoiding wounding the tree's bark. Spraying with fixed copper at leaf drop in the fall and at bud swell in the spring can help prevent this bacterial infection. If you need to prune your maples, prune during dry weather- at least 48 hours without rain after making pruning cuts. Clean and sterilize your pruners after removing diseased wood. A spray of Lysol or a rubbing alcohol dip is a good way to clean the tools.



Acer palmatum 'Beni Kawa'
A Coral Bark Maple

Maples in Containers

Japanese maples can be container grown, but need special attention to be successful. Choose a cultivar that is suitable for your light situation, especially if the container will be in full sun in the summer. Water carefully as maples do not like to dry out. Invest in a watering timer to make sure the tree gets even moisture. Choose a light colored container or make sure the container is shaded from hot sun. The roots are very sensitive to overheating. Winter-protect the pot, either by moving it into an unheated building or greenhouse, or wrapping the pot with insulation.



Acer palmatum 'Aoba Jo' in a container. This maple is root-pruned every year during dormancy and repotted with new soil.

Repot your maple every 2-3 years. You can continue to use the same pot if you root prune when you repot. Use a good, coarse, sterile potting mixture.