PLANT AT A GLANCE

LATIN NAMES: Although many maples are grown in Japan, the species usually associated with Japanese maples are Acer japonicum, Acer palmatum, and Acer shirasawanum. **EXPOSURE:** Japanese maples thrive with morning sun and afternoon shade. **CONDITIONS:** They prefer well-drained fertile soil, ideally with a 6.0 pH. Basically, Japanese maples thrive in the same conditions that pine trees favor. HARDINESS: USDA Zones 5-9 PLANTING: The ideal time to transplant is spring, while the tree is still dormant. However, these trees can be transplanted any time the tree is not in leaf. Plant at soil level or with a slightly raised root flare; don't bury a Japanese maple too deeply. When growing in containers, line the bottom of the pot with gravel for drainage. WATERING: Japanese maples do not like soggy or bone-dry soil. Use the "finger test" to find out if the soil is slightly dry to the touch before applying more water. FERTILIZING: Because Japanese maples prefer to grow at a moderate pace, fertilizing is not necessary. Feeding should only occur before June, using a fertilizer with a nitrogen number of 15 or lower.

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PRUNING: Sculpting leads to some beautiful forms in Japanese maples. Prune in mid- to late March. FLOWERS: Although Japanese maples are not usually considered to be a showy flowering tree, some have interesting red tassels. More striking are the often-colorful samaras (winged seedpods) that follow. **COLORS:** Spring is when most Japanese maples feature their boldest color, with colors including green, yellow, white, pinks, maroon, and orange with bicolor markings. Japanese maple leaves vary in color throughout the growing season. **HEIGHT:** Although Japanese maples range from 3-25 feet in height, some shoot up more rapidly than others. Growers Matt and Tim Nichols prefer to consider how large a tree typically becomes in 15-20 years. **PROBLEMS:** Planting too deeply causes problems, and string trimmers can wreak havoc. Aphids also can be an issue.

- 1. Acer palmatum 'Saiho'
- 2. A: palmatum var. dissectum 'Crimson Queen'
- 3. A. palmatum var. dissectum 'Waterfall'
- 4. A. palmatum 'Mila'
- 5. A. palmatum var. dissectum 'Tamukeyama'
- 6. A. shirasawanum 'Moonrise'
- 7. A. palmatum 'Milky Way'
- 8. A. palmatum 'Tsukasa Silhouette
- 9. A. palmatum Emperor I
- 10. A. palmatum 'Matthew'
- 11. A. palmatum 'Okukuji nishiki'
- 12. A. palmatum var. dissectum 'Seiryu'
- 13. A. palmatum 'Beni Otake'

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GROWING JAPANENSE MAPLES IN CONTAINERS

- Japanese maples are the best deciduous trees for container gardening.
 - 1. Diverse color and form
 - 2. Slow growth habit
 - 3. Shallow, fibrous roots
 - 4. Hardy in coldness zones 5-9
- B. Choosing the tree
 - 1. Consider the mature size of the tree and the location in which it will be placed.
 - 2. Start with a small tree.
 - 3. Consider the light exposure of the location in which you will place the tree.
 - 4. Consider the hardiness of the tree. A rule of thumb is that a plant in a container should be one zone hardier than the zone in which it is to be grown.
 - 5. Consider the seasonal changes of color of the tree and find one you love.
- C. Choosing the container
 - 1. Depending on the size of the tree's root ball, choose a pot or container that will double the volume of soil of the original pot.
 - 2. As the tree matures, you can double the size of the pot or container until the tree reaches the desired size.
 - 3. You can then use root pruning and reduction to maintain the size and keep the tree in the same container.
 - 4. Japanese maples can live to be 100 years or older. It is important to find a pot that is durable against the elements and can be lifted or moved. Fiberglass or polyethylene pots or bowls can be used. If using glazed or unglazed ceramic pots of any size, it is advisable to line them first with a plastic nursery or decorative pot to protect the ceramic one from cracking with the freezing and thawing of the soil of the root ball.
 - 5. Wooden planters make very good containers since they usually do not crack with the freezing and thawing of the root ball. Their bottoms should have good drainage holes and may have to be replace every few years because of rotting.
 - 6. Containers should be as wide as they are tall to allow the fibrous root systems of the maples to do well. This also provides stability for the tree—especially if it is tall.
 - 7. Maples do best in well-drained, acid soil. They do not like wet feet! Use a high quality commercial soil mix. A bark-based mix is suitable. The use of compost, manure, or garden soil is not recommended because of the possibility of introducing excessive bacteria or fungi to the root ball.
 - 8. If area water is heavy in minerals or alkaline, find a potting soil for azaleas or camellias. This will provide the correct Ph for the maples.
 - 9. Plant the root ball at soil level or slightly raised and don't cover the root flare.

- D. Repotting and Pruning
 - 1. Trees will grow in the pot to which it has been planted for several years with minimal maintenance. Make sure there is adequate drainage from the pot. Fertilize once a year in early summer.
 - After two to five years, it will be necessary to replace the exhausted soil in the container and replace it and revitalize the root system with root pruning. Signs that indicate it is time for this include little or no new growth, leaves and stems discolored or deformed due to nutrient deficiency, or compacted soil.
 - 3. Timing is probably the single most important criteria to a successful root pruning. Dormancy, two to three weeks prior to bud break, is ideal. Watch for slight swelling and shininess of buds. During this time, there is actual root growth but no demand on the root system from the tree.
 - 4. You will need by-pass pruners, a garden claw or root hook to pull out compacted roots, a small hand saw with fine teeth, and a small shovel or hand spade to fill in the soil.
 - 5. To protect the branches of the tree, lay the container on its side on a tarp and pull the container from the root ball. Vigorously separate the roots. Remove heavy, woody roots that take up valuable space needed for air and water. If heavily compacted, use the saw to remove a section of the root ball all around and on the bottom. However, never remove more than a third of the roots in one pruning. After cutting out the woody roots and matted outer roots, remove most the of old soil with a water hose. Soak the remaining root ball using a root stimulant such as *Superthrive* in water prior to replanting.
 - 6. Put a layer of soil in the bottom of the container adequate to raise the crown of the tree to one inch below the top of the container. Be sure to support the root ball when lifting to place it into the container. Holding the tree in position, fill in around the root ball, lightly packing the soil to within an inch of the top of the container. Do not plant too deeply. Do not cover the crown of the tree.
 - 7. Water the tree until water flows through the bottom of the container. After about a week, apply a liquid fertilizer such as fish emulsion or *Dynagrow*. You should see a vigorous response of growth in the year following the root pruning.

REFERENCES

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