



Captivating Japanese Maples

By Ginny Landes

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

What's not to love about a Japanese Maple tree? They provide undeniable beauty, graceful form, and a symphony of autumn colors to the garden, and are a good choice for large or small gardens, for the patio, and for container planting. Not only are they easy to grow and free of pests and disease, but they come in a kaleidoscope of color, shapes and textures.

The Maple (*Acer*) family has over 120 species developed in Japan in the 1700's. These trees grow wild throughout Europe, North Africa, Asia, and North America. They range in size from four feet to 100 feet tall.

The ornamental Japanese Maple (*Acer Palmatum*) has over 1,000 cultivars and lives to be over 100 years old. They are distinguished by opposite leaf arrangement, where the leaves are opposite each other on the stem. Their foliage is divided into two types, either palm-shaped or delicate and lacy, and all have male and female flowers on the same plant. Quail and songbirds are attracted to their flowers. Flowers are followed by fruit called "samaras," shaped like wings, which spin and carry the maple seeds a long distance. These seeds can be collected for propagation but, when grown, may not be an exact clone of the parent plant. However, I've found that the seeds from our Japanese Maples, growing wild in the yard, have grown to be the exact same beautiful tree.

Japanese Maples grow well in Sunset Western Garden Book's Climate Zones 2-10. They are slow-growing to 20 feet tall with equal or greater spread. Location is important as they like filtered or afternoon shade and shelter from dry, hot winds. Keep them moist in well-drained, slightly acidic soil. A common cause of failure in the Japanese Maple is poor drainage. If they

August Village Life

show burn on leaf edges, flood their soil occasionally to leach out salts. Leaf burn seems to affect the more finely-cut leaf type. Prune to accentuate the natural shape and no more than one-third of the structure, in early fall to the end of January in mild-winter areas. Fertilize sparingly in spring and mid-summer with half the strength listed on the label of any all-purpose fertilizer.

The names of some magnificent Japanese Maples are fun to pronounce. Here is a small list of some popular and favorite varieties among experts: *Acer palmatum* 'Shin Deshojo' has stunning pinkish crimson color in spring; *Acer palmatum* 'Ukigumo' has dense, striking variegated foliage; *Acer palmatum* 'Inaba Shidare' has a weeping form 10 feet tall and 12 feet wide with foliage from deep purple in spring to vivid red in fall; *Acer palmatum* 'Shishigashira' has an unusual architectural shape with upright branches and small crinkled leaves; and *Acer palmatum* 'Koto-no-ito' is considered to be one of the best thread-leaf varieties.

Without a doubt, there is a Japanese Maple for every garden. They provide the most variable and enchanting beauty of all the ornamental trees.

Currently we are in phase 2 resumption of activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Master Gardener events will for the foreseeable future be limited. Please see our calendar of events for learning opportunities. We realize our public classes are valued by County residents and we especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge.

We do have some good news: the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, is open to the public, from 9 AM to noon on Fridays and Saturdays. State and county public health guidelines require us to limit visitors to ten at a time (including our docents) and ask that they practice social distancing and wear face coverings. Restrooms will not be open. Check http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information.

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the "Ask a Master Gardener" option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We'll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news.