



# Color splash

Japanese maples can add pizzazz to any landscape

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**Q**uestion: Can you suggest a small tree to add to our landscape?

**A**nswer: Japanese maples are a great small tree addition to any landscape. They are native to Japan and Korea. Japanese maples are usually less than 25 feet tall with a fine texture and year-round appeal.

Japanese maples have the potential to be one of the most outstanding small trees for specimen plantings and focal-point use in residential landscapes. The trees have eye-catching appeal with the combination of showy spring and summer foliage, smooth bark and interesting form. What we refer to as a Japanese maple is generally a cultivated variety (cultivar) of *Acer palmatum*, but Fullmoon maple, *Acer japonicum*, is often thrown into the Japanese maple mix.

A staggering diversity of more than 700 cultivars translates into a promise of a tree for just about any personal desire and any landscape use. With so many cultivars, it's difficult to make generalities about their character; however, all the cultivars of Japanese maples take on a new persona with each season.

In spring, the new leaves appear with vibrant colors of red, yellow, pink or rich green. Variegated cultivars are a party of colors. As summer arrives, leaf color intensifies with deeper greens or purples. Autumn brings spectacular flames of color. Depending on the cultivar, fall leaves show off



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**Japanese red maple threadleaf**

shades of yellow, orange, red or purple. Once the leaves have flamed out, their branches bare all with twisted, weeping, mounded or upright statements of various sizes and shapes.

Here are a few growing tips if you are considering dipping your toe into the sea of Japanese maples.

Winter is the best time of year to add Japanese maples to the landscape. First, select a proper planting site. Your Japanese maple will perform best in rich, well drained, slightly acidic soil with consistent moisture. Plant on a slight mound in poorly drained soil or look for a new site.

Do not plant in dry or windy sites. Protect from wind such as on the east side of the house. Some cultivars do well in full sun while others require afternoon shade. Afternoon shade or dappled shade is best for most. Too much shade, however, may translate into slow growth. Too much shade may also cause red-leaved and variegated types to turn green; and yellow types may not show gold undertones.



**"Osakazuki" Japanese maple**

In too much sun, cutleaf and variegated forms can literally fry. During dry periods, water deeply (top 12 inches of soil) by placing the hose within the drip line of your tree and letting the water trickle into the soil. Avoid overhead watering, which encourages fungal diseases. Keep soil moist but not soggy. Mulch around the base of the tree with 3 to 4 inches of organic material such as wood chips. Be sure not to place mulch next to the tree trunk.

Do your homework on deciding which cultivars to acquire by considering your desired plant characteristics. Not all cultivars are readily available; however several nurseries in our area carry a great selection.

Here are some suggestions:

"Bloodgood" is a common cultivar. Unfortunately there is more than one clone in the trade, so investigate the specific plant before buying to make sure it has the desired characteristics. It can reach 15-20 feet tall with a rounded habit. "Bloodgood" has excellent red fall color and is probably the most cold-hardy of reddish-purple forms. It



**"Bloodgood" Japanese maple**

has beautiful blackish red bark.

"Dissectum Atropurpureum" is compact and slow growing. It has finely cut leaves that are deep red.

"Osakazuki" has large green leaves that turn bright-red in the fall.

"Sango Kaku" has young stems that turn a striking coral red in the winter. Fall foliage is very bright orange-yellow.

Full moon maple, *Acer japonicum*, is a lesser known and occasionally available small tree species that is similar to Japanese maple but has larger leaves; hence it has a bolder texture. Full moon maple has spectacular red/orange/burgundy fall foliage color depending on the cultivar.

*Do you have a gardening question? Please email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu), 541-672-4461, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*