

Crabapples are versatile, small, ornamental trees used in the urban landscape. Crabapples bloom in spring, usually in May, bearing flowers that vary a great deal in color, size, and fragrance. Flower buds are often red, opening to pink or white flowers. Crabapples also vary greatly in their shape and size—weeping, spreading, upright, and rounded forms are available. The mature size and shape of the plant should be considered in your selection.

Crabapples thrive in full sun and grow best in well drained, slightly acidic soils (pH 5.5-6.5); however, they will grow well in many soil types. They normally are relatively drought tolerant once established and need little fertilizer.

Disease resistance should be a consideration in choosing your tree. Many resistant cultivars are available and recommended in order to avoid the most common disease problems.

There are four diseases that seriously affect crabapple. *Apple scab* is a fungal disease which develops in cool, wet springs. On susceptible crabapples, apple scab causes spotting of the leaves, premature defoliation, and unsightly spots on the fruit. There are numerous cultivars that are resistant or tolerant (still susceptible but with little defoliation) so choose one based on its resistance. *Rust* is a less serious leaf-spotting disease common to native crabapple cultivars. It is usually a problem in areas where native junipers (*Juniperus*) are planted. Selecting resistant cultivars can control this disease. *Powdery mildew* is a fungal disease that can cause considerable damage to leaves of susceptible cultivars without threatening the survival of the tree. Poor air circulation, close association with susceptible apple cultivars, and humid weather conditions will greatly influence disease incidence and severity. *Fire blight* is a serious bacterial disease of crabapples. Though it is less common than the others, if left untreated it can be fatal to susceptible crabapple cultivars. Select resistant cultivars.

The ornamental fruit of a crabapple puts on a show during the fall and winter, ripening between July and November. Fruits vary from less than ¼" to 2" in diameter and can be red, orange, or yellow. Some are edible; many are attractive to birds. The best ones for birds have fruits that persist (stay on the tree) after leaf fall and even frost, providing winter food.

Light pruning is useful for keeping plants healthy, improving form, and correcting structural problems. Prune in late winter or just after flowering. Remove dead, diseased, or broken branches at any time. Occasional thinning of the crown allows light into the center of the tree, and is done by removing a few smaller branches back to a branch angle. Heavy cuts of one-inch or more should be avoided since they induce excessive water-sprout growth that will ultimately fill in the tree center. Suckers from the base of the trunk are problems with many types of crabapples and should be pruned as close to the ground as possible each season. It is important to disinfect pruning tools after each cut since pathogens can be spread by pruning tools.

FLOWERING CRABAPPLE VARIETIES

Adirondack Height 18 feet—width 10 feet. Dense foliage, upright form. Profuse, fragrant white flowers followed by bright red jewel-like ½” fruit that birds love. Disease resistance: scab (excellent), fireblight (excellent), rust (excellent), mildew (excellent). A Great Plant Pick.

Marilee Height 12-14 feet—width 6-8 feet. Neat upright form. White flowers. Fruitless variety—great as street tree or for patios/outdoor rooms. Disease resistance : scab (good), fireblight (good), rust (good), mildew (excellent).

Raspberry Spear Height 20 feet—width 8 feet. Upright columnar form. Pink buds open to bright magenta flowers; foliage is purple, turning bronze in summer and orange in fall. Purple-red 1/2” fruit that birds love. Disease resistance: scab (excellent), fireblight (excellent), rust (excellent), mildew (excellent).

Ruby Daze Height 22 feet—width 16 feet. Upright oval form. Bright magenta flowers; foliage is purple, turning bronze in summer and orange-red in fall. Dark red 1/4” fruit that birds love. Disease resistance: scab (excellent), fireblight (excellent), rust (excellent), mildew (excellent).

EDIBLE CRABAPPLE VARIETIES (STOCKED WITH FRUIT TREES)

Dolgo Height and width 25-30 feet. Upright spreading shape. White flowers, red oval 1½” fruit. Edible variety—great for jelly. Good pollenizer for early and mid-blooming apple trees. Disease resistance: scab (good), fireblight (good), rust (excellent), mildew (excellent).