ORNAMENTAL CRABAPPLES

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, fragrance, and visual appeal. It is common for flower buds to be red, opening to pink or white flowers. The fruit ripens between July and November, and varies in size from ¼” to 2” long or wide. 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.

Crabapples vary greatly in their shape and size. The mature size of the plant should be considered in your selection. Disease resistance should be another consideration. Many resistant cultivars are available and recommended in order to avoid the most common disease problems. Before making a selection, keep in mind that not all crabapples do well in every location. Disease intensity varies from region to region, and disease strength can vary from year to year.

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 very 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 health 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 then the others, if left untreated it can be fatal to susceptible crabapple cultivars. Select resistant cultivars.

Trees only produce fruit after they have had flowers. The ornamental fruit of a crabapple puts on a show during the fall and winter. Fruits vary from less than ¼” to 2” in diameter. By definition, Malus trees with fruit larger than 2” are not crabapples, but apples. The best crabapple selections have small fruit, less than one-half inch, with bright, attractive colors (red, orange, and yellow). Some cultivars have showy fruits after hard frost, persisting (staying on the tree) throughout the winter, and providing food for birds.

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.
ADIRONDACK.  Height 18 feet—width 10 feet. Dense foliage, upright form. Waxy white flowers followed by bright red jewel-like ½” fruit that birds love. Good disease resistance. Disease resistance: scab (excellent), fireblight (excellent), rust (excellent), mildew (excellent).

GOLDEN RAINDROPS.  Height 20 feet—width 15 feet. Upright vase-like form. Profuse white flowers, persistent golden yellow ¼” fruit that birds love. Leaves are deeply cut. A truly elegant crabapple. Disease resistance: scab (excellent), fireblight (poor), rust (excellent), mildew (excellent).

KLEHM’S IMPROVED BECHTEL.  Height and width 18-20 feet. Rounded shape. Very large, double, pink flowers, sparse green 1” fruit. Orange and orange-red fall color. Disease resistance: scab (fair), fireblight (fair), rust (poor), mildew (excellent).

LANCELOT.  Height and width 8 to 10 feet. Rounded form. White flowers; persistent gold fruit. Disease resistance: scab (excellent), fireblight (excellent), rust (excellent), mildew (excellent).

PERFECT PURPLE.  Height and width 20 feet. Nice rounded form. Flowers are deep pink to rose; foliage is dark red-purple. Red fall foliage; small red to purple fruit. Very cold hardy. Disease resistance: scab (fair), fireblight (fair), rust (good), mildew (excellent).

PRAIRIFIRE.  Height and width 15-20 feet. Upright rounded shape. Bright pinkish red flowers; fruit dark purple-red, ½”. Purple new foliage becoming reddish green. Outstanding orange fall color. Reddish bark. Disease resistance: scab (excellent), fireblight (good), rust (excellent), mildew (excellent).

ROYAL BEAUTY WEEPING.  Height 10-12 feet—spread 10-14 feet. Nice compact weeping form. Foliage emerges deep purple, turns to reddish green. Fragrant reddish purple flowers. Dark red, persistent fruit. Disease resistance: scab (good), fireblight (excellent), rust (excellent), mildew (good).

SHOW TIME.  Height and width 10-15 feet. Upright pyramidal shape. Bright fuchsia red flowers; fruit is cherry red. Purple new foliage becoming reddish green. Disease resistance: scab (fair), fireblight (good), rust (good), mildew (excellent).

SPARKLING SPRITE.  Height and width 12 feet. Rounded dense form. Pink buds open to white flowers; foliage a bright clean green. Persistent fruit turns from yellow to orange. Disease resistance: scab (excellent), fireblight (excellent), rust (excellent), mildew (excellent).

EDIBLE CRABAPPLES (STOCKED WITH FRUIT TREES)

**CENTENNIAL.** Height 8-10 feet—width 6-8 feet. Upright form. White flowers. Edible variety—1½” long, oval, red fruit with white fresh. Ripens early September. Excellent for jelly and cider; is also sweet and juicy enough for fresh eating. Good pollenizer for early and mid-blooming apples. Disease resistance: scab (excellent), fireblight (good), mildew (good).

**EVERESTE.** Height and width 8-10 feet. Elegant semiweeping form. Covered with fragrant white flowers in spring, red 1” fruit good for jellies and pickled apples in fall. Long blooming; good pollenizer for most apples. Disease resistant.