**Acer palmatum: Japanese Maple**

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

**Introduction**

Japanese maple has a height and spread of about 20 feet, but there are much smaller selections available. The multiple trunks are muscular-looking, picturesque, grey, and show nicely when lit up at night. Japanese maple is grown for its green or red colored leaves, interesting growth habit and fine leaf texture. Fall color ranges from bright yellow through orange and red, and is often striking, even on trees grown in total shade. Growth habit varies widely depending on cultivar from globose, branching to the ground to upright, vase-shaped. The globose selections look best when they are allowed to branch to the ground. Be sure to clear all turf away from beneath the branches of these low growing types so the lawn mower will not damage the tree. The more upright selections make nice patio or small shade trees for residential lots, and, with pruning to remove drooping branches, provide adequate clearance for pedestrian traffic to pass close to the tree. More compact cultivars make wonderful accents for any landscape.

**General Information**

**Scientific name:** Acer palmatum  
**Pronunciation:** AY-ser pal-MAY-tum  
**Common name(s):** Japanese maple  
**Family:** Aceraceae  
**USDA hardiness zones:** 5B through 8B (Fig. 2)  
**Origin:** not native to North America  
**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

**Uses:** specimen; deck or patio; container or planter; trained as a standard; Bonsai  
**Availability:** not native to North America

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**Description**

Height: 15 to 25 feet  
Spread: 15 to 25 feet  
Crown uniformity: symmetrical  
Crown shape: vase, round  
Crown density: moderate  
Growth rate: slow  
Texture: medium

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)  
Leaf type: simple  
Leaf margin: serrate, lobed  
Leaf shape: star-shaped  
Leaf venation: palmate  
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous  
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches  
Leaf color: green  
Fall color: red, orange, yellow, copper  
Fall characteristic: showy

**Flower**

Flower color: red  
Flower characteristics: not showy

**Fruit**

Fruit shape: elongated  
Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch  
Fruit covering: dry or hard  
Fruit color: red  
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns  
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure  
Breakage: resistant  
Current year twig color: green, reddish  
Current year twig thickness: thin  
Wood specific gravity: unknown

**Culture**

Light requirement: partial sun or partial shade, shade tolerant  
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained  
Drought tolerance: moderate  
Aerosol salt tolerance: none

**Other**

Roots: not a problem  
Winter interest: yes  
Outstanding tree: no  
Ozone sensitivity: unknown  
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible  
Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

**Use and Management**

This large shrub or small tree tends to leaf out early, so it may be injured by spring frosts. Protect them from drying winds and direct sun by providing exposure to partial or filtered shade and well-drained, acid soil with plenty of organic matter, particularly in the southern part of its range. Leaves often scorch in hot summer weather in USDA hardiness zones 7b and 8, unless they are in some shade or irrigated during dry weather. More direct sun can be tolerated in the northern part of the range. Be sure drainage is maintained and never allow water to stand around the roots. Grows fine on clay soils as long as the ground is sloped so water does not accumulate in the soil. Responds well to several inches of mulch placed beneath the canopy.

Variegated types are a bit more difficult to grow and are subject to leaf scorch. There are many cultivars of Japanese maple with a wide variety of leaf shapes and color, growth habits, and sizes: ‘Atropurpureum’—reddish leaves with five lobes; ‘Bloodgood’—new foliage bright red, darkening to dark green; ‘Burgundy Lace’—reddish foliage and cut leaves; ‘Dissectum’—finely dissected leaves in green or red, 10 to 12 feet tall; ‘Elegans’—leaves with rose-colored margins when they first unfold; ‘Ornatum’ - foliage is cut and reddish.

**Pests**

Aphids infest maples, usually Norway maple, and may be numerous at times. High populations can cause leaf
Another sign of heavy aphid infestation is honey dew on lower leaves and objects beneath the tree. Aphids are controlled by spraying or they may be left alone. If not sprayed, predatory insects will bring the aphid population under control.

Scales are an occasional problem on maples. Perhaps the most common is cottony maple scale. The insect forms a cottony mass on the lower sides of branches. Scales are usually controlled with horticultural oil sprays. Scales may also be controlled with well-timed sprays to kill the crawlers.

If borers become a problem it is an indication the tree is not growing well. Controlling borers involves keeping trees healthy. Chemical controls of existing infestations are more difficult. Proper control involves identification of the borer infesting the tree then applying insecticides at the proper time.

**Diseases**

Scorch occurs during periods of high temperatures accompanied by wind. Trees with diseased or inadequate root systems will also show scorching. When trees do not get enough water they scorch. Scorch symptoms are light brown or tan dead areas between leaf veins. The symptoms are on all parts of the tree or only on the side exposed to sun and wind. Scorching due to dry soil may be overcome by watering. If scorching is due to an inadequate or diseased root system, watering may have no effect.

Nutrient deficiency symptoms are yellow or yellowish-green leaves with darker green veins. The most commonly deficient nutrient on maple is manganese. Implanting capsules containing a manganese source in the trunk will alleviate the symptoms. Test soil samples to determine if the soil pH is too high for best manganese availability. Plants exposed to weed killers may also show similar symptoms.

Tar spot and a variety of leaf spots cause some concern among homeowners but are rarely serious enough for control.