



Township of Bernards Shade Tree Commission

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Japanese Maples (*Acer palmatum*)

Acer palmatum, commonly known as Japanese maple, is a highly regarded landscape plant native to Japan, China and Korea. The form commonly grown is more shrub-like than tree-like. Larger varieties grow up to 25 feet tall. Numerous Japanese maple variants with particular interest such as leaf color, leaf shape and growth rate have been selected and named. Many cultivars with Japanese names date back several centuries to the time when the horticulturalists in Japan began selecting maples for their special ornamental qualities.

The name 'palmatum' is attributed to Carl Peter Thunberg, a Swedish doctor and botanist who visited the Far East in the late eighteenth century. The name refers to the five lobed leaves which are like a hand. Plants reached England in 1820 and since then many additional cultivars have been developed. Currently there is a devoted following for growing Japanese maples with nursery and individual hobbyist collections reaching 500 or so varieties. The thousands of named cultivars reveal a passion for collecting varied specimens based on nuances in appearance and growth rate, dissection of the leaf and the particular leaf color in various seasons.

Japanese maples can tolerate shade and some may 'burn' in the sun. They grow well in the general landscape and last for many years, but most don't tolerate a colder climate than our own.

Some Japanese maples growing in our area are 'Tamukeyama' that has finely dissected leaves, a dark purple-red color, and a cascading habit. 'Red Feathers' has very finely dissected leaves, a red color, and grows to only 2 feet high and 3 feet wide in 10 years. It was developed by Vermuelen Nursery of Neshanic Station, NJ. There is an upright cultivar with green leaves and white variegation, Oku Kuji Nishiki. 'Bloodgood' is a non-dissected type that grows into a small, rounded, deciduous tree which typically grows to 15 to 20 feet tall and features

purplish-red flowers in spring, deep reddish-purple summer foliage, and red samaras (seed pods) in late summer to early fall and good crimson-red fall color.

See the leaf and color variations below:

