Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories

PLANT HEALTH CARE REPORT

Japanese Maple

Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) is a spectacular, aristocratic tree suitable for a wide variety of landscapes. As its name implies, Japanese maple is native to Japan, China and Korea. It was cultivated by the Japanese long before it was introduced into England and the United States in the early 1800s.

Mature Japanese maple cultivar

It can be used as a medium-sized specimen tree, an accent plant, bonsai, or as a border shrub depending on the cultivar selected and the style of pruning. Mature height ranges from 6 to 50 feet, with most varieties in the 15 to 25 feet range. Foliage color also varies with cultivar from purple-red all season long to red in the spring and fall and green during the summer. Some varieties are variegated as well.

Acer palmatum var. dissectum

Cultivars are adapted from zones 5 to 8, the warmer areas of Massachusetts and New York south to Georgia, and all of California. Growth is best in moist, well-drained soils that are high in organic matter with an acidic pH, although varieties can tolerate a pH range of 6 to 8. Light shade is ideal, but full sun is acceptable for many cultivars if irrigation is provided during summer droughts. Growth is rapid when young and site conditions are optimal.

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Popular cultivars include:

‘Bloodgood’: best deep purple leaf color; slow growing; small (15–20’)

‘Burgundy Lace’: reddish purple leaf which fades slightly in the summer; deeply lobed leaves appearing almost pinnately compound; small (12–15’)

‘Dissectum’: doubly lobed green leaves with fernleaf texture; weeping branches; small (6–12’)

‘Dissectum Atropurpureum’: similar to ‘Dissectum’; leaves purple-red in spring in moderate light; orange in fall

‘Waterfall’: best green dissectum leaf; red to yellow in fall; small (10–12’)

Proper pruning of Japanese maple is essential for tree health. Annual light pruning is preferred to maintain tree size, shape, and health. When pruning is done infrequently and heavily, the tree may become stressed due to loss of stored sugars and reduced capacity to photosynthesize. Heavy pruning may lead to sunscald followed by bark injury and cankers.

Lack of water is a serious problem for Japanese maple. Trees in full sun or on windy sites often suffer from excessive drying even during minor droughts. Symptoms of drought damage include browning or necrosis of the leaf margins and twig dieback. Drought may also

Monitoring and Treatment Considerations for Japanese Maple

Mid-winter

Monitor for scale, cankers, and twig borers; treat as needed. Expose and inspect root collar for problems. Add mulch as necessary. Remove dead, dying, diseased, and broken branches. Lightly reduce or remove branches to promote appropriate structure.

Late winter to early spring

Sample soil for nutrient and pH levels. Fertilize, adjust pH, and amend soil according to soil analysis.

Mid-spring

Apply fungicide treatment to suppress anthracnose and leaf spot as needed.

Late spring

Monitor for leaf-feeding and scale insects; treat as needed. Monitor irrigation and soil moisture to minimize water stress and prevent root disease.

Early summer

Apply fungicide treatment to suppress anthracnose and leaf spot as needed. Monitor for leaf-feeding and scale insects; treat as needed. Release beneficial organisms for biological control.

Mid to late summer

Monitor irrigation and soil moisture to minimize water stress and prevent root disease.

predispose them to other problems such as fungal cankers.

Root problems are common and may produce the same symptoms as drought. Verticillium wilt is a vascular disease caused by a soilborne fungus that infects roots. In addition to leaf wilting, branches, or the entire tree may be killed. Phytophthora root rot and root collar canker are common diseases associated with wet sites. Excess water in the soil stresses the roots and allows for easy spread of this water mold. Early symptoms are similar to a nematode attack, but death of the tree tends to occur more quickly.

Japanese maple is susceptible to a number of leaf spot diseases that may disfigure leaves and cause early defoliation. The major foliar diseases are anthracnose, Phyllosticta leaf spot, and Pseudomonas tip blight.

Several insects attack Japanese maples. Japanese beetle is a leaf-feeder that can cause significant damage. Scales can also stress and cause the decline of an otherwise healthy trees. The major scale insect pests are Japanese maple, cottony maple, cottony camellia, oleander, and cottony taxus scale. Aphids feed on leaves producing honeydew that encourages the growth of black sooty mold fungus on leaves or on surfaces beneath the tree.

Fall

If sucking insects were problematic this past growing season, consider treating with an appropriately timed systemic product.