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Japanese Maples have been cultivated since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and they are native to Japan, northeast China and Korea. In their natural habitat, they are normally shaded by larger trees and so prefer partial shade.

Japanese Red Maples are surprisingly easy to grow and maintain. They are generally winter hardy to about –20 degrees. One well-placed Japanese Red Maple adds grace and elegance, and acts as a focal point to any garden or landscape. There are over 400 varieties, grafted and seedling types- with a bewildering array to choose from. Figure out the size of tree you want, specifications of location (including amount of shade or sun), then decide on the leaf color and leaf form.



**Lace-leaf varieties (Weeping)** –These smaller trees accentuate an entry way, or in rock, patio, or water garden setting as a feature plant. Most lace-leaf varieties will grow between 5 and 10 feet wide by 5 and 10 feet tall. **Note:** The lace-leaf varieties will appreciate some shade in the afternoon, though this is not absolutely necessary. It is also best to plant the tree in a well drained location.



**Palmate varieties (Uprights)** – The upright trees can reach 20-25 feet. They are good accent trees in beds or islands that receive full sun or partial shade. It is best if the site is well-drained. **TIP:** Scatter a few boulders near your Japanese Maple and watch how much this brings the foliage and texture out.

### Planting a Japanese Red Maple

1. Dig a hole 2-3 times as wide as the root ball or container; dig the hole no deeper than the root ball or container when planting. In heavy, poor draining clay soils, the hole should be just deep enough that the top of the root ball is 4-6" above the surrounding grade.
2. When hole is dug, mix 50% (by volume) organic matter such as clay cutter, mushroom compost, or peat moss into the native soil. Do not add fertilizer at this time.
3. Place the tree in the hole and backfill with black earth top soil. Once backfilled water the base.

Japanese Maples are extremely vulnerable in spring. They leaf out of winter dormancy with the first warm weather. Tender new growth is then at the mercy of a late spring frost. Remember our early spring of 2007!!! The average date of the last frost is the end of April, depending on location and elevation. If your tree is young and small enough, protect it from these frosts by covering it. It is the frost more than the cold that is the danger; a good wind can save the day. Damp, hot springs can be equally dangerous due to the fungal problems- good air circulation, soil drainage and sanitation practices all help prevent these problems.

Also, mulch your trees with 2 1/2 - 3" of shredded bark, preferably hardwood, to insulate the roots and prevent water from evaporating around the tree. Generally, water deeply twice a week; water more often if it is a newly planted tree or a container-grown tree.

Leaf tip burn is unsightly, but not a cause for panic. It is most often a result of too much water, too little water, an underdeveloped root system (as a newly planted tree would have), or too much fertilizer. Afternoon shade and good watering practices help, but in some conditions, you may have to live with it for the rest of the season. Under extremely stressful conditions your maple may drop all its leaves but they have a secondary set of leaves waiting for just such a time. The tree is protecting itself and telling you it is not getting enough water. When your tree is stressed, do not try to fertilize it into feeling better; instead, feed it kelp meal or something similarly rich in trace elements. Also, if your tree is stressed, be on the lookout for other problems such as insects or disease. Catch these problems early so you can deal with them immediately and prevent a spiral of decline. Leaf spot can be a problem as well. (see additional handout)

Pruning for form is best done in late summer or early fall. Good form is largely a question of personal taste. Many folks like to let air and light into the center of the tree so that we can see the tracings of branch structure. Working up from the base and from inside to out, clean out small twigs growing along the trunk and major branches, dead wood, and crossed and rubbing branches. Stand back and look carefully at your tree's shape. If it is not pleasing, look for what you need to remove to improve its form. Before making each cut, study where the branch goes, and visualize the tree without it. Cut just above a live bud or just in front of the collar (the small ridge where a branch attaches to another).

Planting in the fall can be very rewarding. Try to plant at least 4 to 6 weeks before the ground freezes. The roots get a chance to establish themselves, and, come spring, the tree will be ready to put on new growth. If there is no rain be sure to water until the ground freezes and in the early spring. Mulching is always a good idea for fall; it will help insulate the roots for winter and protect their early spring growth.

Remember that Japanese Maples are fun and elegant and with just a little care will bring you great pleasure in your landscape for years. The most difficult decision will be which one of the over 400 varieties to choose.