

Yard and Garden – 05-16-09 – Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

Although their radiant visual impact is drawing to a close, I'm still thinking, "Wow, what a show!" One of the many reasons spring has always been my favorite of the four seasons is due to the flowering trees, and near the top of my list are those flowering trees belonging to the genus *Malus*. We commonly know them as crabapple trees.

I've often wondered how such a charming tree acquired such a strange and unflattering name. I can certainly understand the apple part of its name, but why the word crab? Like many words in the English language, crab has many definitions. Usually, when I use or hear the word *crab*, I'm thinking of a person with a sour disposition, one who complains about everything. Since crabapple trees generally produce small, edible fruits that are sour tasting, maybe that's why they're called crabs. At any rate, it certainly seems uncomplimentary.

Over a thousand different cultivars of flowering crabapple trees exist, although perhaps only about 100 are commonly planted nationally. They all have one thing in common. They're grown for their ornamental beauty.



Crabapples are small-to-medium sized trees. Most crabapple trees grow fifteen to twenty feet in height. They have diverse shapes consisting of weeping, rounded, spreading, columnar, vase and pyramid. Crabapple trees are ideal for



today's smaller residential landscapes. They can easily be grown under power lines, as specimen trees, as screens, or as wildlife habitat. Often they are grouped in mass plantings. Some of the newer cultivars are small enough to be grown in containers.

The colors of crabapple blossoms vary. Unopened flower buds may hint of one color and as the flowers open, assorted hues are revealed in a spectacular display. Colors range from snow white, to delicate pinks, to deep reds. The flowers exist as single types, semi-double or double types. The single flower has only five petals; whereas the semi-double has six to ten petals. Ten or more petals are found on the double flowering types. An interesting note about the doubles is they generally bloom longer and produce less fruit than the other types.



Most crabapple trees bloom before their leaves appear. Leaf colors range from a deep emerald green to assorted shades of red.

Often, it is the fruit which crabapple trees produce that can make them undesirable. I've often heard people crab about crabapples because of the mess the apples can make in the home landscape.



I firmly believe there is no such thing as the perfect tree; however, with all the beauty crabapple trees have to offer, their fruit production should be treated as a minor inconvenience. Keep in mind; many cultivars are available that produce little if any fruit. I suggest one should research the specific attributes of a given cultivar before selecting and planting. Many of the

newer crabapple trees produce very small fruits that remain hanging on the tree throughout the winter months, thus offering additional ornamental value and a great food source for wildlife.

Flowering crabapples do best in full sun requiring a minimum of eight hours a day. They can tolerate most soil types and do well in areas where the soils remain moist but well drained. Most flowering crabapples are hardy and can tolerate cold temperatures to USDA Zone 4.

Fungal diseases such as cedar/apple rust and apple scab can be a problem in crabapples. With so many cultivars from which to choose, and with many of the newer cultivars being disease resistant or tolerant, I again urge one to research before buying and planting. Below is UNL's recommended list of crabapple cultivars resistant to apple scab.

UNL's recommended Crabapple cultivars resistant to apple scab.		
<i>Red Flowering</i>	<i>Pink Flowering</i>	<i>White Flowering</i>
Adams	Jewelberry	Andirondack
Baskatong	Louisa	Amberina
Centurion	Pink Satin	Autumn Glory
Indian Summer	Profusion	Centennial
Makamik	Red Splendor	Chestnut
Prairiefire	Silver Moon	Christmas Holly
Red Baron	Tea	Donald Wyman
		Molten Lava
		Ormiston Roy
		Professor Sprenger
		Redbud
		Red Jewel
		Sargent
		Sinai Fire
		Sugar Tyme
		Weeping Siberian

For additional information on apple scab, log onto the University of Nebraska's website <http://www.ianr.pubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1922/build/g1922.pdf>

Although you may have missed the radiant beauty of this spring's flowering crabapple trees, there is still time to plant one for next year. By so doing, you can be ready for next year's spectacular show.

