



Small Maples for the Landscape

Many years ago when I was a mere sapling myself, my neighbor let me dig up a small tree from her yard. I planted it in my own yard and nurtured (i.e. ignored) it as only a young boy can. It was a Silver Maple. My father pruned this vigorous plant to keep it from growing into and on top of the house. The tree continued to grow around the sides of the house until it looked like it would embrace (i.e. crush) the house. The point is some maples are big. On the other hand, some are smaller and ideal for spots where space is tight.

Amur Maple, *Acer ginnala* in scientific terms, is a very hardy maple usually found in multi-stemmed form. It generally grows to 15 or 20 feet. While it prefers moist to well-drained soil it can tolerate some dryness. It is suitable for sun or light shade. Fall color varies from yellow to red, and several cultivars have been selected for their fall color. 'Flame' and 'Embers' both have consistent bright red fall color. 'Emerald Elf', as the name would indicate, is a short 5 to 6 foot shrubby Amur maple with orange to red fall color.

Another small maple hidden among the large is *Acer rubrum* 'Emerald Elf', as the name would indicate, is a short 5 to 6 foot shrubby Amur maple with orange to red fall color.

Even among the larger cultivars one can find some more diminutive varieties. *Acer platanoides* or Norway maple may reach 40 to 50 feet or more, but the variety 'Crimson Sentry' grows about 25 feet and has only a 15-foot spread. It has dark purple foliage throughout the spring and summer but not much in the way of fall color. It is a very adaptable tree, tolerant of a wide range of conditions.

One large group of small maples is the Japanese maples. There are literally hundreds of Japanese maples divided between non-dissected and dissected or cut-leaf varieties. *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood' is a common non-dissected variety. The wine red foliage holds its color well throughout the summer, especially in dappled shade. It has excellent red fall color. It is slow growing, maturing at about 15 to 20 feet with a similar spread. 'Crimson Prince' is very similar but is more vigorous and cold hardy. A common cutleaf variety is 'Crimson Queen'. The crimson red leaves of spring may become more bronze green in the

Acer griseum, the Paperbark Maple, is a wonderful specimen tree. Dark bluish-green leaves in the summer turn a beautiful russet red in autumn. It's common name comes from its peeling or exfoliating bark. Shiny Three-flower Maple or *Acer triflorum* has ash-brown bark that peels in papery thin layers to reveal a beautiful cinnamon orange-brown inner bark. The color. It is tolerant of clay soils and can adapt to our alkaline soils. Paperbark Maple is best planted in the spring. It grows slowly to a height of 20 to 30 feet with an equal spread.

It does not produce the typical whirlybird seeds of most maples. 'Brandywine' is adaptable but does prefer slightly acid soil.

summer. It redeems itself in the fall with brilliant scarlet color. 'Crimson Queen' exhibits the cascading habit of many Japanese maples, topping out at about 8 to 10 feet with a slightly wider spread. 'Inaba Shidare' is another cutleaf variety with purple red spring foliage and red to crimson fall color. It is a relatively fast growing cutleaf type maturing at 8 to 10 feet. It is among the more cold hardy of the dissectum.



Japanese Maples are exquisite small trees.

Japanese maples prefer moist soil high in organic matter and need protection from winter winds. Plant them where they get a bit of shade during the hottest part of the day in summer. Even established plants will need watering during dry times.

Not all Japanese maples have

red or crimson summer foliage. Now, look out the window at that spot that you felt always needed a tree, and picture one of these small maples. Remember, when it comes to maples, it's OK to be small-minded. and size.