

## The Beautiful Crabapple



Around Mother's Day, crabapples burst into bloom. The flowers range in color from the purest white, pinks, coral, to almost red and can be single, semi-double, or even double. You may find crabapple trees up to 30 or 40 feet tall, but most varieties are in the 5 to 25 foot range. Dwarf cultivars will fit into the smallest yard. Tree shapes can be rounded, oval, columnar, horizontally spreading, upright or weeping. Trunks can be single or multiple. Leaves may be dark green, reddish, or bronze in color. Only a few varieties have good fall color. Visit the Minnesota Arboretum's large collection of crabapples to see spectacular bloom, fruiting, and form throughout the seasons; note a nice variety to include in your garden.

Later in the season, most crabapples will produce fruits ranging from pea-size (1/4") up to 2". Trees with larger fruit are true apples. Some larger crabapple fruit are used in jams, jellies, and cooking. Many modern varieties have small fruit that persists well into winter, providing human interest and food for birds. (Ever see a flock of turkeys up in a crabapple tree?)

Smaller varieties can be planted under utility lines. Trees of appropriate size are planted in median strips, perennial gardens, and lawns. Crabapples form a beautiful back border in the shrub garden

Insect pests are not a big problem, but diseases such as apple scab, cedar apple rust, powdery mildew, or fireblight can cause leaf fall, weakening of the tree, and even death of the crabapple. Apple scab is the major problem in our area.. Early in the season, the apple scab fungus appears as dark olive spots on the leaves. Later, the leaves turn yellow-gray and fall off. If the apple scab is extensive, all the leaves may fall off, the tree is weakened, and may eventually die early. Fireblight is a bacterial disease that causes twigs to die back, canker formation, and eventual death of the tree. Cedar apple rust fungus causes orange spots on the leaves. Powdery mildew fungus causes a powdery white covering over the leaves.

With over 1000 crabapple cultivars available, some selections have proven resistant to apple scab and other disease. Look for disease resistance when purchasing a crabapple for your yard. Some older varieties flower beautifully, but are prone to severe scab. Good sanitation—removing leaves and fallen fruit will lessen the over-wintering of disease spores. If your trees do suffer from scab, a fungicide spraying schedule may be needed throughout the spring and summer. Read and follow the label on all garden chemicals.

Choose a full sun site for your new tree. Shaded crabapples suffer from increased mildew infection, poor fruiting and flowering, and poor limb development. Select an area with good, well draining soil. Water new trees well, and thereafter during dry spells. Remove an area of lawn around the tree to avoid competition from the grasses and lawnmower/weed whip damage to the trunk. Mulch under the tree but not touching the trunk.

Happy Gardening, Joe Baltrukonis

### Recommended Reading:

- APPLE SCAB RESISTANT CRAB APPLE CULTIVARS -- Hardy in Zone 4.  
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/yardandgarden/ygbriefs/p242applescab-crab.html>
- Flowering Crabapples, Steve Fouch,  
[http://www.portal.msue.msu.edu/objects/content\\_revision/download.cfm/revision\\_id.308966/workspace\\_id.-30/Flowering%20Crabapple%20.pdf/](http://www.portal.msue.msu.edu/objects/content_revision/download.cfm/revision_id.308966/workspace_id.-30/Flowering%20Crabapple%20.pdf/). Michigan, excellent slide presentation of recommended crabapples, pictures.
- Flowering Crabapples for Maine, <http://umaine.edu/publications/2058e/>
- Marvelous Malus—Ten Crabapples Worthy to Know, Show, and Grow  
[http://www.bbg.org/gardening/article/marvelous\\_malus/](http://www.bbg.org/gardening/article/marvelous_malus/). Brooklyn Botanical Garden recommends 10 scab-free crabapples.
- Selection, Care, and Use of the Ornamental Crabapple, HYG-1029-95, <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/1000/1029.html>. Ohio, good info on care and selection.