



Malus 'Snowdrift'

Malus 'Liset'



Malus 'Mary Potter'



Malus sargentii



Malus floribunda

CRAB APPLES CAN BE BOTH BEAUTIFUL AND TOUGH

By Douglas J. Chapman, Horticulturist, Dow Gardens, Midland, Michigan

Crab apples are an extremely popular small tree, filling a unique place in the landscape, with outstanding flower color in the spring and good fruiting during the autumn. There are some 200 cultivars available in the trade, but due to susceptibility to apple scab and fireblight, the list of actively-grown cultivars should be drastically adjusted. The following 15 varieties of crab apples show a high degree of resistance to apple scab and fireblight while being aesthetically outstanding. These should be divided into white and pink flowering forms.

The white flowering forms to be discussed are *Malus* 'Beverly,' 'White Angel,' 'Mary Potter,' 'Red Jewel,' 'Snowdrift,' 'White Cascade,' *M. hupehensis*, *M. floribunda*, and *M. sargentii*.

'Beverly' Crab Apple is an upright, oval tree, reaching 25 feet at maturity. This annual flowering plant produces dark red buds which break into clear single white flowers. The small red fruit are quite colorful during the fall months.

'White Angel' Crab Apple has outstanding white flowers. The summer foliage is dark green which contrasts the small dark glossy red fruit during the fall. At maturity its habit is somewhat round, reaching 20 feet in height.

'Mary Potter' Crab Apple's unique horizontal branching habit separates it from any other crab apple. Its ultimate height is 12-15 ft. This profuse producer of clear white flowers and dark red fruit (½ in.) makes it an outstanding specimen tree.

'Red Jewel' Crab Apple is a recent introduction of American Garden Cole which holds its small (½ in.) hard bright red fruit into February and March, providing good winter color. This crab apple's mature habit of growth is an upright, oval tree, reaching 15-18 ft., with slightly horizontal branching. The clear white flowers produced annually are quite attractive.

'Snowdrift' Crab Apple is exciting in its annual profuse display of clear white flowers. When in flower, this plant is outstanding as a single specimen or in mass plantings. For a crab apple, this cultivar is a large tree, reaching 25 ft. in height. This vigorous plant requires little annual pruning to maintain its dense oval shape. The small orange-red fruit (¾ in.) is effective for only a short period of time.

'White Cascade' Crab Apple, another recent introduction, is one of three good pendulous forms. At maturity this plant reaches only 12-15 ft. in height, but is outstanding as a weeping tree. The white flowers complement the unique growth habit. The small (¼ in.) lime-yellow fruit of 'White Cascade' make it one of the few good yellow fruiting forms.

Tea Crab Apple (*Malus hupehensis*) has a somewhat vase shape, reaching 25 ft. in height. This plant has been grown in the trade for many years but, with its unique habit, white flowers, and red fruit, is still useful in the landscape.

Japanese Crab Apple (*Malus floribunda*) is an outstanding specimen crab apple. This round dense tree reaches 25 ft. at maturity. This plant continues to show outstanding disease resistance. Annually *M. floribunda* produces pink buds which at full bloom has clear, white flowers. The yellow-red fruit developing in the fall is another unique characteristic of this outstanding crab apple specimen.

A few crab apples show a high degree of resistance while being aesthetically outstanding

Sargent Crab Apple (*Malus sargentii*) is the original and, for many years, only dwarf crab apple, reaching only 8 ft. in height. Biannually it produces good clear, white flowers and small, dark red fruit. The fruit of this plant is among the first to mature and seems to be a primary food for birds, reducing its effectiveness for color.

The outstanding pink and red crab apple varieties include *Malus* 'Adams,' 'Liset,' 'Profusion,' 'Coralburst,' and 'Candied Apple.'

'Adams' Crab Apple at maturity has a somewhat round habit of growth, reaching 25 ft. in height. The dark pink buds open to a clear, pink flower. The carmine-red fruit developing in the fall make this one of the truly showy trees for mass planting.

'Liset' Crab Apple has a somewhat upright or vase shape habit of growth, reaching 20 ft. at maturity. Annually this variety produces good dark red flowers. The new growth, also being somewhat red or maroon, prolongs the period of color through early summer. The dark crimson fruit (½ in.) is somewhat contrasted against the dull green foliage, making this a good specimen tree.

'Profusion' Crab Apple is the purplish or red flowering complement to Japanese Crab Apple. This plant, which reaches 25 ft. at maturity, is outstanding as a specimen plant with good, dark oxblood-red fruit developing in the fall.

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'Coralburst' Crab Apple is a recent introduction with a somewhat dwarf, twiggy habit of growth. This plant annually produces an abundant quantity of clear pink flowers which make this an outstanding shrub or tree on a standard.

'Candied Apple' Crab Apple is a somewhat weeping or pendulous variety, reaching 18-20 ft. in height. It annually produces large purplish-pink flowers. During the fall months, the large dull red fruit (½ in.) are somewhat obscured by the normal foliage color.

Tschonoski Crab Apple (*Malus tschonoski*) is more appropriately a specimen or street tree. It is a narrow, upright growing tree which reaches 25-30 ft. in height. It rarely flowers or fruits but has silver-green foliage in the summer with an outstanding maroon fall color. The plant is clearly in a class by itself with little flowers or fruiting but, for those interested in minimum maintenance and fall color, it integrates well as a specimen tree.

Today, the above limited list of crab apples are among the most outstanding cultivars of this colorful small tree. They all show good resistance to apple scab and fireblight, but we must be continually evaluating these and new varieties as resistance breaks down due to overplanting or simply new virulent forms of apple scab and fireblight. There is always room in the trade and landscape for new varieties.

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