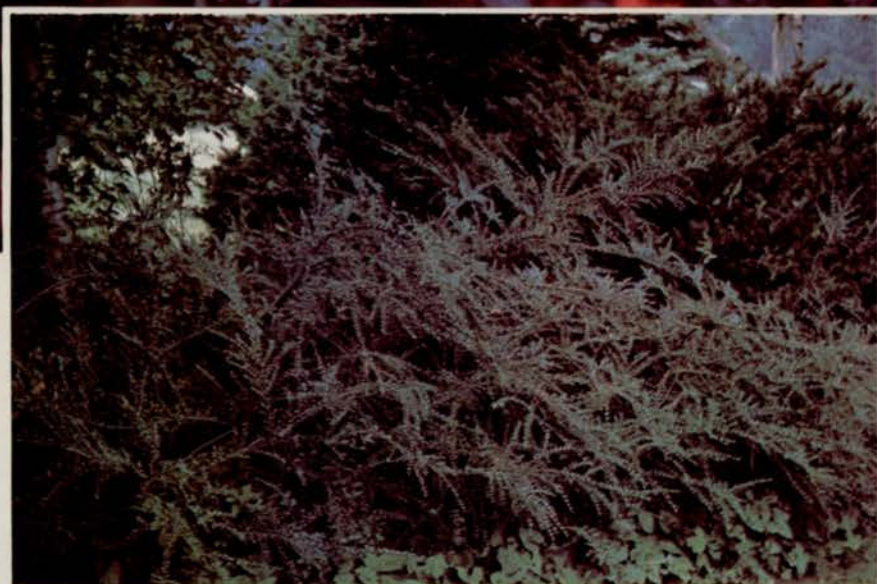
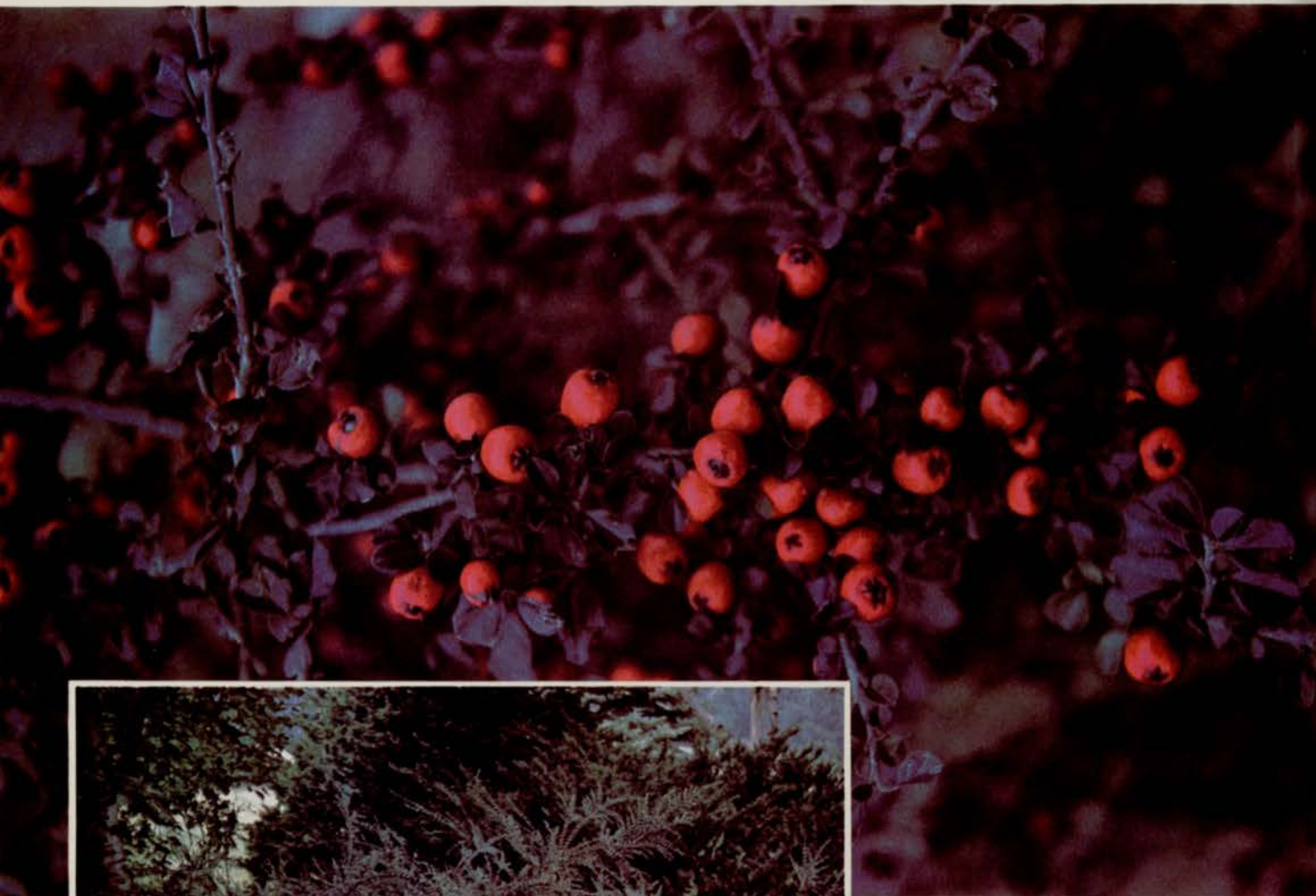


# DENSE AND SHOWY, COTONEASTERS MAKE A GOOD CHOICE

BY DOUGLAS CHAPMAN



**Cotoneaster apiculata** (top photo) is an outstanding ground cover with dark glossy green summer foliage becoming a reddish maroon in the fall. **Rockspray Cotoneaster** (bottom photo) spreads in a fishbone pattern and is well-suited for rock gardens and home landscape.

Cotoneaster is THE shrub of the Rosaceae family with exciting leaf color, yet obscure blossoms. Cotoneasters are native to Asia, specifically China and the Himalayas (Nepal). It should be noted that none are native to North America. Cotoneaster's outstanding qualities

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include rich green foliage, outstanding fall leaf color, showy fruit, and unique habits of growth. When considering hardiness for the Midwest or Northeast, four cotoneaster species are outstanding. They include *Cotoneaster apiculata*, *C. horizontalis*, *C. divaricata*, and *C. zabelii*.

Cranberry Cotoneaster (*C. apiculata*) has an irregular mounding habit; becoming dense, almost impenetrable to foot traffic. It is an outstanding ground cover, being low and wide spreading with an ultimate width of three feet and spread of 6 to 8 feet. This mounding on itself is unique to this species. Cranberry Cotoneaster has a rather rapid rate of growth if adequate fertilizer and water are provided. It thrives in well-drained soils and establishes very rapidly. It is unique in that it continues to grow throughout the summer months as long as it receives adequate water and fertilizer (a useful fact in the container production of *C. apiculata*). The summer foliage is a dark glossy green, becoming a reddish maroon in the fall. The round leaf is about 1/2- to 3/4-in. across, a truly beautiful detail. The pink flowers that appear in late May through early June are extremely small and

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The profusely produced brilliant fruit is relatively large and . . . extremely showy. Cranberry Cotoneaster has an irregular mounding habit; becoming dense, almost impenetrable to foot traffic.

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not too effective. The profusely produced brilliant red fruit is relatively large and, in fact, considerably larger than *C. horizontalis* and extremely showy. The main insect problem of *C. apiculata* is aphids during mid-summer with mites also building up during periods of hot dry weather. Of the ground covers, *C. apiculata* seems most resistant to Fireblight.

Rockspray Cotoneaster (*C. horizontalis*) is a slow growing,

spreading ground cover, reaching two feet in height with a spread of five feet. The branches off the main stem are in a fishbone pattern, being perpendicular to the main stem and usually in one plane. Rockspray Cotoneaster is considerably slower growing, has a smaller leaf, and smaller pink flowers than Cranberry Cotoneaster. Further, it establishes more slowly, yet is more suited to rock gardens and individual home landscapes whereas Cranberry Cotoneaster is exciting in mass plantings, whether foundation or large commercial landscapes. Rockspray Cotoneaster can be planted in mass and eventually will become a barrier to foot traffic. There are many cultivars available. Dirr suggests that 'Little Gem' and 'Tom Thumb' (which may, in fact, be the same plant) are outstanding, dwarf, broadly-mounded, fine-textured, and extremely slow-growing. Hillier, on the other hand, suggests that *C. horizontalis*' 'Variegata,' a plant with the edges of the leaves being creamy white contrasted against the vivid green, is especially exciting and pleasing during the fall months with the white variegation contrasting with a dull red fall leaf color. These two cultivars are worth looking for in the trade and for landscape use.

Spreading Cotoneaster (*C. divaricata*) is one of the largest, most open forms, ranging 5 to 6 feet in height with an equal spread. It establishes quite rapidly after transplanting. Its texture is relatively fine. The leaves are a good, dark glossy green in summer with outstanding fall color, ranging from yellow to a deep glossy maroon. It holds its leaves so late in the fall that it can almost be considered a semi-evergreen. The rose-pink colored flowers are small and not effective. They are usually borne singularly or in units of three during late May through mid-June. The fruit are a medium to dark red which usually develop color in September that is effective through November. The individual rounded pome fruits are 1/4-in. wide. In the landscape *C. divaricata* can form an exciting mass planting, border planting for home or commercial landscapes, and an outstanding formal hedge. Of all

the cotoneasters, *C. divaricata* seems to be most insect and disease resistant with *C. apiculata*, *C. zabelii*, and, lastly, *C. horizontalis* in descending order.

Cherryberry Cotoneaster (*C. zabelii*) has been reported by Chadwick to be one of the truly outstanding cotoneaster types. It is native to Central China. It has a rather upright habit, reaching six

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feet in height. The pinkish flowers are borne in clusters of 3 to 9. The summer foliage, again, is a dark green with fall color being generally yellow. The bright red fruit are borne in multiple clusters and contrast well with the fall foliar color. Cherryberry Cotoneaster does have some problems with mites and aphids. It is good when used in large area or commercial landscapes in mass plantings or as single specimens.

The cotoneasters are good as specimens or in mass plantings. Rockspray and Cranberry Cotoneasters, the ground cover types, are both small, providing almost impenetrable barriers to foot traffic. Certainly *C. apiculata* has to be considered the outstanding species, due to its rapid rate of establishment and growth, abundant fruit, habit of growth, and (except for aphids) is relatively pest free. Cotoneaster, like most plants in the Rosaceae family prefers full sun and well-drained soils. Of the upright types, *C. divaricata* is the most maintenance-free and shows reasonable resistance to Fireblight while not affected catastrophically by aphids or mites. These Asian imports fill an important niche for many plantings due to their dense habit, outstanding summer leaves, fruit, and generally good fall color.

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