

## Your garden in October – Japanese maples

### Marvellous maples

Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*) are among the finest of foliage plants for small gardens, with an enormous array of leaf shape, size and colour; reliable, spectacular autumn display; and an elegant, mushroom-domed form.



They range from small weeping varieties suitable for pots and small gardens up to modest trees like *A. palmatum* var *dissectum* 'Seiryu' which can eventually reach 7m (22ft).

Japanese maples make excellent specimen plants either at the edge of a border, beside a patio or as a focal point in a rockery. Their finely divided foliage and cascading habit also mean they look good besides steps or alongside a pond or water course where their graceful form can be appreciated to the full. Maples with contrasting foliage colours look fabulous planted in groups.

*Acer palmatum* grows best in a slightly acidic, sandy, humus-rich, well-drained loam. Most cultivars will adapt well to other soil types, but will not tolerate wet or dry conditions or very alkaline soils. Given its origins as a woodland tree, it likes shelter from cold, easterly winds and is best in dappled rather than dense shade.

Green-leaved cultivars such as 'Ellen' will tolerate full sun but in extremely

hot conditions may scorch without some afternoon shade. Variegated forms need partial shade, while purple-leaved cultivars such as 'Crimson Queen' need some sun in order to develop their deep, rich colour.

*Acer palmatum* cultivars, particularly those with finely dissected leaves, are prone to leaf scorch, where the leaves turn brown particularly around the edges and veins, then curl and shrivel. This happens when water is lost from the leaves faster than the roots can take it up. It can be caused by frost, drought, drying winds, hot sun, and salt-laden winds in coastal area. Whilst the plant is not dying, it is a cry for help! Water thoroughly and provide more shelter if possible.

Japanese maples adapt well to life in a pot. Choose a loam-based compost such as John Innes No. 3 with up to 20% added grit or perlite to improve the drainage. Never allow the pot to dry out and re-pot to a slightly larger container every two or three years.

A spectacular display can be seen at this time of year at the Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire. A good specialist supplier is Junker's Nursery in Somerset. [www.junker.co.uk](http://www.junker.co.uk), tel: 01823 480774.