

Japanese Maple Planting & Care Guide

MAPLES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Choose a location that is protected from drying wind and the hot sun. Japanese maples thrive in bright or filtered shade and some will tolerate morning sun. Choose a North or East side of a house or fence if possible. These locations block the wind and protect from the afternoon heat. Placing maples under or near larger trees is another good option. Lace leaf Japanese maples are best grown in shade or filtered shade.

Soil preparation is **the most important element** in the overall health of a Japanese maple. Our soil is mostly clay, has a high pH and drains slowly. Japanese maples prefer an airy, fast draining soil with a lower pH. Japan is basically an inactive volcano making its soil a lot like lava rock. To achieve the correct balance of pH, drainage and water retention a few amendments will be necessary.

Alden Lane Nursery suggests this formula:

1/3 Acid Planting Mix

1/3 Forest Bark – small size

1/3 Native Soil

Mix all items well and use this mixture to backfill the hole. Creating a mound to plant in is a great way to ensure good drainage for muddy areas. Refer to Alden Lane's "Planting Trees and Shrubs" guide for help on preparing the hole.

Japanese maples need a regular water supply with good drainage. Allowing the soil to dry out completely will severely injure the roots. Be sure to provide for deep, regular watering (i.e. drip irrigation).

Be sure to keep an area of at least 3 feet around the maple clear of grass, groundcover and weeds. Mulch to a depth of two inches to moderate soil temperatures and conserve moisture. Avoid fertilizing the area especially with high nitrogen lawn fertilizers, as this will cause leggy, ungainly growth. Japanese Maples grow slowly, so pruning should be kept to damaged or diseased wood only. For large specimen pruning, call a professional.

MAPLES PLANTED IN CONTAINERS

Many varieties of Japanese maple can be grown in containers successfully with little effort. This has become increasingly popular for today's smaller yards, patios and even Bonsai. Alden Lane Nursery offers a large selection of smaller maples ideal for container growing.

Select a pot for your tree that will allow ample room for root growth; this will be determined by the size of the root ball you start with. A wider shallow pot is ideal as Japanese maples have shallow roots systems. You can use plastic, ceramic, wood, or terra cotta – keep in mind wood and terra cotta pots dry out faster than others and will require more frequent watering. **Be sure the pot has plenty of drain holes.**

Choose a site for your container that has bright shade or good morning sun with afternoon shade (depending on variety) and is accessible for watering. Be sure the container can sit in a position that allows water to flow freely out of the drain holes. A container plant should never be allowed to sit in standing water, so use pot feet or bricks to be sure the pot is up off the ground slightly. Saucers are *not recommended* for container grown Japanese maples.

It is important that your soil mix drains quickly. Alden Lane Nursery suggests this formula for containers:

½ Acid Planting Mix

¼ Micro Bark

¼ Perlite

OR

Masters Professional Potting Soil

plus

8 quarts of Perlite per 18" container

Mix the soil and bark together then add the **perlite**. Mix well before potting.

Water the Japanese maple in its nursery pot, plant and water in. Keep the soil moist during the growing season and relatively dry in the dormant season. Be sure to check soil moisture often in summer, as plants in containers will dry out much faster than those in the ground, drying out can result in major leaf burn, stress or death. Running a drip irrigation line to the pot is great way to avoid drought problems.

Feed your container maple with **Happy Frog Japanese Maple Food** in March, May & September or with **Dyna-Gro 7-9-5** at half strength. Every three to five years your tree will need to be transplanted to a larger size pot or will require some root pruning. Consult a horticultural professional at the nursery for information.



Alden Lane Nursery

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Keeping Your Japanese Maple Healthy

Have you had the experience of watching your beautiful Bloodgood Japanese Maple go from bright red in spring to brown in summer? Did you ever wonder how your friend in Danville can keep their maples looking good in *full sun*, and yours in Livermore turns crispy by July, in the shade? Ever try to figure out why some Japanese maples seem to die off in large sections every year? The following information should help!

The dry summers in our area contribute to what is known as “Leaf Margin Burn”, which in small doses does not hurt the tree, but year after year weakens the tree and leaves it susceptible to disease and decline. Here are some of the contributing factors, and how you can help your tree avoid it.

HARD WATER

Hard water may contribute most to leaf margin burn in our area. This depends on what water your particular area uses. Most gardeners in this area with the exception of those on EBMUD water in the Walnut Creek/Danville area reside in hard water areas, where the water is highly mineralized and usually alkaline. Gardeners on well water usually have it even worse. The concentration of these impurities in the root system results in these minerals being taken up into the leaves causing leaf margin burn.

Deep watering and using **Growmore E-Z Wet Soil Penetrant**, and/or **Gypsum** can help leach these impurities away from the roots. The concentration of minerals is one problem with hard water and pH is the other. Regular watering with alkaline water will steadily move the pH of the soil up. Japanese maples like a pH of 5.5 to 6.5. To counteract the pH problem, water in **EB Stone Soil Sulfur** in March and September being sure to not disturb the roots. Another great trick is to use water treated with vinegar (1 Tbsp. per gallon) to re-acidify the soil and wash away impurities. Fill up a large container with this mixture and let it sit out 24 hours to allow chlorine etc. to evaporate before using.

DROUGHT

Japanese maples have shallow fibrous root systems and if the root zone dries out completely the tree can experience complete defoliation or at least burning of the leaves. Water regularly and thoroughly. Make sure irrigation water is effectively soaking the entire root system (i.e. one dripper on a tree is not enough; a spray irrigation for five minutes is not enough). Keep the roots mulched to avoid soil temperature extremes and to help retain moisture. Using **Growmore E-Z Wet Soil Penetrant** 3 – 4 times per year can do wonders for allowing water to get down *into* the roots and additionally aides in washing impurities *out* of the root zone.

HEAT

The Tri-Valley area can get extremely hot during the summer months and this heat significantly contributes to leaf margin burn. Avoid placing your maple in areas that get large amounts of reflective heat such as against a south facing wall. If you grow maples in containers, be sure the pot is not in direct contact with patio or other surfaces that get hot in summer. Basically, avoiding heat is all about placement of the tree in an area that stays relatively cool and moist. Mulching aides in keeping the root zone cool. Deep watering results in deeper roots; deeper roots result in less stress from heat and drought.

WIND

High, dry wind is a major contributor to leaf margin burn and may be the most difficult to avoid. Placing the tree in a protected area would be ideal (i.e. blocked by the house or a tall hedge), but these options are not always available. Monthly application of **Dyna-Grow ProTekt** will help strengthen cell walls with silicon, improving resistance to heat and drought.

Notes on disease: There are several soil borne pathogens that attack Japanese Maples in this area, resulting in major limb loss and death. Verticillium is the most common problem we see in our local gardens, marked by entire branches usually leafing out then promptly dying back the same spring. Good drainage and deep watering are the keys to preventing these problems, but you should always be on the look out for symptoms. Many maple varieties are prone to “tip die-back” and other problems that cause small branches to die; these should be pruned out annually to avoid the disease working its way into the main branches and trunk of the tree.



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