

Flowering Crabapple

Flowering crabapples are beautiful, small, flowering trees for landscaping. There are few other trees that look as spectacular as a crabapple in flower. They are desirable for the foliage, flowers, fruit and habit or size. Some selections have outstanding fruit display which can last until late winter. Choose ones with excellent, annual-bearing flowers, small, colorful fruit, good habit and branching, and disease resistance, especially to apple scab.

Most crabapple trees are between 15–25' tall and 4-25' wide at maturity, depending on cultivar or species. Some cultivars only reach 5' tall. Crabapple trees offer an interesting range of shapes from low mound, shrub-like to dwarf trees to narrow-upright, wide-spreading, round, oval, horizontal, vase-shaped or pendulous (weeping) types.

Crabapple flowers can be white, pink, rose, or red. The flowers are often pink when in bud. Flowers can be single, with 5 petals, semi-double or double with many petals. Some cultivars are alternate bearing, meaning that every other year the tree produces a large amount of flowers with the alternating years resulting in sporadic flower development. Choose ones that flower heavily each year. By using different cultivars/species, the flowering period can be extended from May to early June, with colors ranging from white to purplish-red. A few cultivars/species have fragrant flowers.

The fruit colors of crabapples include purple, red, scarlet, pinkish red, orange, yellow or green depending upon the cultivar. The fruit attracts wildlife, especially birds. Some selections have outstanding fruit display, which can last until late winter. A few of the older cultivars/species produce large, ugly fruits that drop and create a huge mess, e.g., 'Hopa' crabapple. If fruit is less than 2" in diameter, it is considered a crabapple. If it is greater than 2", the plant is considered an apple tree. 'Spring Snow' is a fruitless cultivar, but is not recommended due to its susceptibility to apple scab, fireblight and watersprouts.

Flowering crabapples are adaptable to a variety of sites. Crabs prefer a heavy-loam soil, but will tolerate clay soils as long as they are well drained but moist, with no standing water. Flowering crabs require full sun and open exposure to increase air circulation.

Flowering crabs are susceptible to a variety of diseases including fireblight and apple scab. Susceptibility varies greatly between cultivars and species. Disease resistance can vary depending on where a particular cultivar is grown, so be sure to choose one that has been shown to be resistant to disease in your area. Some cultivars are prone to producing water sprouts on the branches or suckers at the base of plants. These need removal, as they lack flower buds and will outgrow the form of the plant. Avoid high-nitrogen fertilization as this can increase the incidence of disease.

Disease and insect susceptibility make many cultivars and species not worthy of use. Apple scab can be severe, causing defoliation in summer. Apple scab resistance can also change over time as the pathogen can mutate making resistant cultivars susceptible, or resistant cultivars may become susceptible over time as different strains of the fungal pathogen move into the area.

The following list of crabapple cultivars are recommended for Wisconsin by Laura Jull of the University Of Wisconsin Department Of Horticulture. Note that many of the recommended cultivars listed here are hardy to Zone 4; however, most of them will tolerate Barron County winters.

- **Adirondack'**: upright to oval, 15–20' tall, 10–12' wide, dark green leaves, dark pink buds opening to large white flowers, persistent red fruit, good for narrow spaces or formal look. Zone 4.
- **Malus baccata 'Jackii'**: upright, rounded form, 30' tall, 20' wide; fragrant, white, early-May flowers; persistent, deep red fruit borne on long stems, hardy to zone 3.

- **'Coral Cascade'**: semi-weeping form, 15' tall, 16–20' wide, pinkish-white flowers, persistent orange-red to coral fruit.
- **'Hargozam' (Harvest Gold®)**: upright form, 20' tall, 16' wide, red to pink in bud, opening to white
- flowers, persistent yellow fruit that turns gold to amber when cold. Zone 4.
- **'Jewelcole' (Red Jewel®)**: rounded to upright form, 15–18' tall, 12' wide; white flowers; persistent, shiny, bright-red fruit turning dark red when cold, borne on long stems; slightly susceptible to fire blight. Zone 4.
- **'Louisa'**: graceful, weeping form, 10–15' tall and wide, rose colored buds open to pink flowers, yellow fruit that fades to brown, birds devour the fruit in fall. Zone 4.
- **'Manbeck Weeper' (Anne E.®)**: wide-spreading, horizontal weeper, 10–12' tall and wide, white
- flowers, persistent cherry-red fruit. Zone 4.
- **'Molazam' (Molten Lava®)**: wide-spreading, horizontal, semi-weeping, 10–14' tall, 12–14' wide, red buds opening to white flowers; persistent, bright red-orange fruit.
- **'Orange Crush'**: spreading form, 12–15' tall and wide, purple to purplish-green leaves, dark pink to red flowers, orange-red fruit.
- **'Ormiston Roy'**: broad-rounded form, 20–25' tall, 20' wide, rose-red buds opening to white flowers, persistent yellow fruit that turns orange in late fall. Zone 4.
- **'Prairie Maid'**: rounded form, 15' tall, 15' wide, purple leaves changing to green, deep pink flowers, cherry-red fruit with a waxy bloom, birds devour the fruit in fall.
- **'Prairifire'**: rounded to upright spreading form, slow growing, 15–20' tall and wide; bark is shiny, purplish with lenticels; purple to maroon leaves changing to dark purplish-green; dark reddish-purple flowers open later than other crabapples; persistent purplish-red to maroon fruit. Zone 4.
- ***Malus sargentii* 'Candymint'**: low, wide-spreading form, 5–8' tall, 8–10' wide, deep pink buds opening to fragrant, rose-pink flowers, bronze-green leaves, red fruit. Zone 4.
- ***Malus sargentii* 'Select A' (Firebird®)**: selection from Johnson's Nursery in Wisconsin; compact, rounded, spreading form, 5–8' tall and 8' wide, slow growing, reddish-pink buds opening to white flowers and a large amount of small, persistent, bright-red fruit. Zone 4.
- ***Malus sargentii* 'Tina'**: dwarf form, can be low and shrubby, 4–6' tall, 8–10' wide or grafted on a standard to get taller plants, slow grower, reddish-pink buds opening to fragrant white flowers, dark red fruit, birds devour the fruit in fall. Zone 4.
- **'Sutyzam' (Sugar Tyme®)**: oval-rounded to upright form, 15–20' tall, 15' wide, pale-pink flower buds opening to fragrant white flowers, persistent bright red fruit. Zone 4.
- **'Purple Prince'**: rounded form, 15–20' tall and wide, rose-red flowers, purple leaves becoming bronze-green, persistent maroon to dark purple fruit, bark is purplish with lenticels. Zone 4.

Check out [UW Extension's Landscape Plants of the Upper Midwest](#) for more information and images.