

## Crabapple

The crabapple (*Malus* species) is a beautiful spring-flowering tree that is valued for its flowers, fruit and variations in growth habit and size. The hardiness depends upon the species, but all should be adapted to all of South Carolina except the coastal region from Charleston south to Savannah, Georgia.



Crabapple in spring

USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database/Herman, D.E. et al.1996. North Dakota tree handbook. USDA-NRCS ND State Conservation Committee; NDSU Extension and Western Area Power Admin., Bismarck, ND.

### Mature Height/Spread

There is a wide variety of tree sizes and forms of crabapples. The height and width of the crown or canopy can range from 10 to 25 feet. Most are trees of various forms, but some are mounded and shrubby.

### Growth Rate

The growth rate is slow to moderate (about 8 to 10 inches per year), depending on the species.

### Ornamental Features

The ornamental flowering crabapple is valued mainly for its flowers and fruit. The blooms, which come out before or with the leaves in the spring, range from white to red. Some crabapples bloom heavily only every other year.



Crabapple blooms

William S. [Justice@USDA-NRCS](mailto:Justice@USDA-NRCS) PLANTS Database

The fruit, which appear in summer, vary in size, but are less than 2 inches in diameter (fruit larger than 2 inches are considered apples). The color of the fruit may be red, yellow or green. While all crabapples are edible, fruit of many ornamental crabapples are not palatable without first cooking and sweetening the fruit. Some crabapples have outstanding fall color, while others do not – it depends on the cultivar. The unusual branching of most crabapples creates a strong silhouette in winter when the leaves are absent.

### Landscape Use

The crabapple can be used in a home landscape as a specimen or patio tree. Because of its small stature, it is a good selection as a street tree under utility lines. Large-fruited types, however, such as ‘Callaway,’ can create maintenance problems with rotting fruits falling to the ground.

The tree is adapted to most sites, but should be placed in full sun for best flowers and fruit. The soil should be moist and acid (5.0 to 6.5 pH) and well-drained. While it requires medium fertility, over-fertilization may make it more susceptible to fire blight.

Pruning is recommended for opening the center of the plant to air and light, removing unwanted branches, shaping the tree and removing suckers. Do this in late winter or early spring before bud-break.

### Problems

Crabapples may be susceptible to fire blight, powdery mildew, rust, apple scab, several canker diseases, leaf defoliators, borers, scale and aphids. Resistance to fire blight, powdery mildew, rust and apple scab varies, depending on the cultivar of the tree and where it is grown. It is important to use a cultivar that has been proven to be resistant in the area where the tree is to be planted. Disease resistance means that infections are few, do not progress very far or do not occur. For more information on disease and insect problems on crabapples, refer to [HGIC 2000, \*Apple and Crabapple Diseases\*](#); [HGIC 2001, \*Apple and Crabapple Insects\*](#); and [HGIC 2208, \*Fire Blight of Fruit Trees\*](#).

### Species

- Japanese Flowering Crabapple (*M. floribunda*) - This is an old favorite introduced from Japan in 1862. It is an annual bloomer with red buds that open to white flowers. The fruit is yellow to red. It grows 15 to 25 feet tall. It is slightly susceptible to scab and powdery mildew and moderately susceptible to fire blight.
- Tea Crabapple (*M. hupehensis*) - This is one of the most elegant crabapples. It is vase-shaped and grows 20 to 25 feet in height and width. The buds are dark pink, turning to white flowers and small red fruit. It is susceptible to fire blight.
- Sargent Crabapple (*M. sargentii*) - This is a mounded, densely branched, shrubby species, growing 6 to 10 feet tall. Buds are red, turning to white flowers. The small fruit is red. It has good disease resistance, although it is slightly susceptible to scab, fire blight and leaf spot.

### Cultivars

Over 800 cultivars are known, with more being developed each year. The following list represents some that are disease-resistant to varying degrees:

- ‘Adams’ - This tree grows 20 to 25 feet. The annual buds are red, the flowers are dull pink and the small fruit is red. It is resistant to scab, rust and powdery mildew.

- ‘Autumn Glory’ - This tree grows in an upright form to 12 feet. The red buds open to white flowers, and the small fruit is bright orange-red. It is resistant to fire blight, powdery mildew, rust and scab.
- ‘Adirondack’ - This tree grows 16 feet tall and 12 feet wide. The annual red buds open to white flowers, and the small fruits are orange-red. It is resistant to scab, rust and powdery mildew.
- ‘Centurion’ - This tree grows 25 feet tall and 15 to 20 feet wide. The red buds open to rose-red flowers, and the fruit is small and glossy cherry-red. It is resistant to scab, rust and powdery mildew.
- ‘Callaway’ - This is one of the favorite white-flowered crabapples for gardens in South Carolina. The pink bud becomes a white flower, and the large (1¼ inch) fruit is red. It grows 15 to 25 feet tall. Reports of disease resistance are varied.
- ‘Indian Magic’ - This tree grows 15 to 20 feet tall and wide. The red buds open dark pink, and the small fruit is red, changing to orange. It is resistant to scab, rust and powdery mildew.
- ‘Indian Summer’ - This tree grows 18 to 20 feet tall. It has rose-red flowers, and the small fruit is bright red. It is resistant to fire blight.
- ‘Mary Potter’ - This small tree grows 10 to 15 feet tall and 15 to 20 feet wide. The biennial dark pink bud opens to a white flower, and the small fruit is red. It is resistant to scab, rust and powdery mildew.
- ‘Molten Lava’ - This tree has a weeping form and grows about 15 feet tall and 12 feet wide. The annual deep red buds open to white flowers, and the small fruit is red-orange. It is resistant to fire blight, powdery mildew, rust and scab.
- ‘Prairifire’ - This tree grows 20 feet tall and 20 feet wide. The red buds open to dark pinkish-red blooms, and the small fruit is red-purple. It is resistant to fire blight.
- ‘Professor Sprenger’ - This tree grows 26 feet tall and 20 feet wide. The pink buds open to white flowers, and the small fruit is orange-red. It is resistant to powdery mildew, rust and scab.
- ‘Red Baron’ - This tree grows about 20 feet tall and 12 feet wide. The deep red buds open to pink flowers, and the small fruit is dark red. It is resistant to scab, rust and powdery mildew.
- ‘Tina’ - This is a low-spreading dwarf selection that grows 6 to 8 feet tall and 8 to 10 feet wide. The pink buds open to white flowers, and the small fruit is red. It is resistant to fire blight, powdery mildew, rust and scab.

**Note:** Chemical control of diseases and insects on large trees is usually not feasible since adequate coverage of the foliage with a pesticide cannot be achieved.

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Prepared by Debbie Shaughnessy, HGIC Information Specialist, and Bob Polomski, Extension Consumer Horticulturist, Clemson University. (New 5/99. Images added 11/06.)

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