

# the moving tree

BY JAN WALSH

I LEFT HOME TO MARRY THE MAN I LOVE and took my Japanese maple with me. Eventually, we moved twice more — and so did the tree. Finally, while planting it (in its fourth home), my husband became so inspired by my love for the little maple, he planted 89 others in 10

varieties. And though each tree now is a part of our home, none is as deeply rooted in my heart as The Moving Tree. Mention a Japanese maple, and most people envision a red, lace-leaved Crimson Queen — like The Moving Tree.

The tree's finely dissected leaves remain deep red throughout the growing season and turn scarlet in fall. With age, new branches grow shorter, and it eventually shapes itself into a cascading form, reaching 9 feet tall and 12 feet wide. The most popular of the red dissectums in the United States, the Japanese maple also has 250 other Japanese maple cultivars.

Varying in size, shape and color, maple trees exist for every garden. For large landscapes of mass plantings, two or more varieties of upright growers create a bold effect. In average size gardens, mound or round shapes provide companions for shrubbery, perennials and mixed plantings. And no garden is too small — not even a patio garden. Dwarf types grow in containers for years, without repotting or root pruning, and full-sized species can be planted permanently in a large tub or container.

Colors change in spring and fall, and most maples thrive in Birmingham's partial shade to full shade. The hardy, spreading Burgundy Lace is a small tree that contrasts well with other upright cultivars or fits into smaller landscapes

with pruning. Delicate and dainty, the small leaved Butterfly has "leaves of its own." Lobes are long, short or irregular. Bluish, light green leaves are variegated cream, with light pink markings in spring and magenta in fall. And as an accent tree, Coral Bark (or Coral Tower) has brilliant coral bark that nears fluorescent in younger wood but provides stronger color as it ages. Bloodgood offers a deep red or black red hue (holding color into late summer without bronzing out). The similar and smaller Fireglow is a vigorous upright, with less deeply divided leaves, which maintain a deeper, intense color throughout summer. And Golden Full Moon offers bright yellow foliage in spring. The sun intensifies its color, although partial shade keeps the yellow longer.

But don't let the maple tree's dainty appearance fool you. They are hearty trees, adaptable to both climate and soil. Just take those "full sun" planting tags (found attached to trees upon purchase) with a bit of shade. Alabama's direct summer rays sunburn most varieties, with a few exceptions suffering only leaf scorch.

Irresistible attention getters in any garden, these specimen plants turn heads wherever they are found. Plant one. You'll never leave it. ●

## growing Japanese maples

**PLANTING:** In a well-drained area, dig the hole slightly larger than the root mass. Mix organic compost with tight, clay soils for conditioning. But leave the hole shallow enough for the root collar (the ground line) to remain slightly above ground. Mound the dirt around the hole to prevent the roots from drying out.

**WATERING:** Consistently water, using the same amount needed for other garden shrubs. Never over water.

**MULCHING:** A 2-inch layer of coarse bark (chips of 3/4 inch) mulch keeps a newly planted maple weed free for three years until it is mature enough to compete for moisture and nutrients with nearby vegetation.

**FERTILIZING:** In soil fertile enough for most garden plants, maples need no additional nutrients.

**PRUNING:** Although no major pruning is necessary, the dormant season is the time to shape, remove fine twiggy growth and clip to avoid crowding.