

Acer palmatum

[Synonyms : *Acer palmatum* var. *atropurpureum*, *Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum*, *Acer palmatum* f. *sanguineum*, *Acer polymorphum*, *Acer polymorphum* var. *palmatum*, *Acer sanguineum*]

JAPANESE MAPLE is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to eastern Asia, particularly China, Korea and Japan it has small, purplish-pink flowers and leaves that turn yellow, bronze, purplish, orange and red in Autumn.

It is also known as Black sugar maple, Green Japanese maple, *Iroha momiji* (Japanese), *Japaninvaahtera* (Finnish), *Japanse esdoorn* (Dutch), *Japansklönn* (Swedish), *Kaede* (Japanese), *Keikanboku* (Japanese), Maple, *Momiji* (Japanese), Mountain maple, and Smooth Japanese maple.

Palmatum means ‘lobed like an open hand with outstretched fingers or hand-like’ with reference to the leaves.

Like that in one or two North American maples the sap from this Asian native, although it contains less sugar than some of its well known close relatives, is still considered to be worth tapping in the early Spring, particularly from the trunks of more northern trees that experience cold winters with the warmer summers of more southern areas. The sap is sometimes made into a soft drink and it is also concentrated to a syrup used to sweeten many foods. It seems that in Chinatoo the leaves, prepared with oil and salt, have provided a famine food.

As with other close relatives, the leaves were thought to have some preservative qualities and have been wrapped around apples (*Malus*) and some root crops before storage.

It is believed to have been introduced to Britain in 1812 and North America in 1820.

Japanese maple is popular as an ornamental plant, not least for its foliage. It has generated many dwarf cultivated varieties (as well as attracting bonsai specialists), is understood to provide a key element in Japanese-style gardens, and is often chosen by urban planners as a street tree. From the point of view of companion planting Japanese maple, as with so many of its relatives, will inhibit the growth of many plants nearby but authorities note that it does seem to be compatible with rhododendrons.