

The maple: an expert's top five picks

By Maria Fox

Would spring be as beautiful without the appearance of the tender new leaves of the maple? Fall color would certainly dim without those autumn hues rustling in the breeze. The maple, in all its splendor, is an essential and indelible part of the Northwest landscape. Native to our region, the maple now can be found in hundreds of varieties and variations — each with particular characteristics that define its contribution to the garden. Colors vary from deep reds to bright intense greens. Fall color spectacles blaze with color from early to late fall depending on the variety and weather. The list of choices include Japanese maples and dwarf varieties.

Trevor Cameron, nursery manager at Wight's Home and Garden, is a maple expert. He suggests when choosing a maple for your landscape to first identify what characteristics you would like it to have. Look at your space — how tall and wide do you want it to grow? Consider what color it will be, as well as the color it will change to in the fall. What shape is best? Do you prefer a broad canopy type profile for summer shade, or a dense leafy ball to create extra privacy? When does each variety leaf out in spring and lose its leaves in the fall?

A maple is like a friend — a good hardy fellow who will live in your garden for many years to come. Independent nurseries are your best resource for selecting your maple. Good nurseries carry dozens of varieties and a few local nurseries carry 100's of varieties to choose from. Certainly, there are plenty of books filled with pictures and information about the many varieties of the maple — but there is no substitution for seeing the trees up close and personal in an environment where expert advice comes from years of experience. A face-to-face introduction is both a wise and satisfying experience.

After years of experience with maples — a trademark of his nursery — Trevor has helped hundreds of people to successfully select the right tree for their landscape.

Here are his top five maple picks for 2008:

Twombly's Red Sentinel — Outstanding red foliage and narrow upright shape — a great tree for tight spaces where a splash of red foliage is needed. We have these planted in our store landscape along the wall by the loading gate, and they get constant recognition for their color and shape. A recent introduction to the nursery trade in 2005, it has narrow growth reaching 15 to 20 feet tall but only 4 to 6 feet wide. Scarlet fall color.

Tsuma Gaki — Spectacular spring color with reddish tips on limey green foliage. The name in Japanese translates “little harp girl with red painted fingernails.” Nice bushy grower to 12 feet tall and wide. Makes a nice specimen or focal point. In summertime tree will get red tones over the green

followed by fall colors in the red to yellow range.

Fernleaf Maple — An *Acer japonicum* species called “*Aconitifolium*” with large dissected foliage and upright growth habit. Very unique foliage that looks almost “tropical” in appearance. Makes a beautiful specimen tree growing large to 20 feet tall and wide with age. Fall colors are bright and range from yellow to burgundy.

Fireglow — A great dwarfish red variety that is good for smaller yards or smaller spaces. Foliage is stunning red all year brightening up to scarlet red in fall. Trees will grow to around 12 feet tall at a slower rate than most. Looking up through the foliage of a Fireglow in the sunshine certainly makes the tree look like it is on fire.

Hupp's Red Willow — An interesting strap-leaf variety with red bamboo-like foliage. The skinny red leaves give this tree a unique appearance. Very nice in pots or as a landscape specimen. Will get large with age reaching 15 feet or so with maturity and turn scarlet in fall. With the leaf texture and red color will look sharp against all the green foliages of Washington.

Information courtesy of Wight's Home & Garden, 5026 196th St. S.W., Lynnwood. Contact them at (425) 775-3636 or visit www.wights.com.