



Tree of the Month

Crabapple, malus

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Photos by Lesley Bruce Smith



Crab trees are to the Chicago area what Southern Magnolias are to the State of Georgia, one of our most ubiquitous flowering trees. The amazing show of spring color that the Crab trees in the midwest display are among our most treasured garden treats. The Crabapple trees and all species of the rose family, of which they are a part, are the most cultivated tree species in the horticulturist's palette. We have over 500 different varieties of Crab trees and that doesn't even include all the Malus species that include the eating apples we have cultivated. But who can blame us, for the riotous spring explosion after our long hard winters and the long history of their use as food.

They are hardy and beautiful and the daintiness of our ornamental woody plant collections with their variety of color

and all round year interest. They provide food and shelter for the birds and a wealthy supply of nectar for our pollinating bees and wasps. They have a long history of use by humans as food, wood for creation of furniture and tools. In fact, Crabapples contain an excellent pectin, which can be used to thicken other kinds of jams. The leaves of the tree are reported to have some anti-bacterial properties as well.

Some of the older varieties suffer from certain fungal diseases that can be easily treated in the spring. Being in the rose family they are all susceptible to a bacterial disease called fireblight which is potentially fatal if it gets a foothold in a tree. The best way to prevent problems with Crabs is to keep them carefully pruned using sanitary trimming techniques, (sterilizing tools between cuts) and allowing good air circulation to prevent fungal disease. Worth every bit of extra effort for the gifts they give in return. The Crabapple tree is a midsize favorite of ours!

