

## Tree Profile: Japanese Maple - *Acer palmatum*

**General:** *Acer palmatum* is native to Japan, China, Korea, eastern Mongolia and southeast Russia. Many different cultivars have been selected and are grown worldwide for their large variety of attractive forms, leaf shapes, and spectacular color variations. The bark on young trunks is usually green or reddish on some varieties, but turns brown or gray with age. Its leaves are lobed with five, seven, or nine acutely pointed lobes. Japanese maples are one of the most popular species for Bonsai worldwide. There are thousands of named cultivars, but not all are available in Australia.

**Lighting & Temperature:** Do NOT place in full sun, semi shade or morning sun is best. Red leaved varieties prefer four to six hours morning sun to maintain the red pigment. Variegated and multi-colored leaves require more shade. Protect from hot drying winds ... and against frost!

**Watering:** Daily in the morning, keep the soil moist - doesn't like wet soil, but don't let it dry out! It has been suggested that a layer of sphagnum moss placed on the soil surface in summer can assist in retaining moisture and creating a humid atmosphere to guard against leaf burn.

Old 'Shohin' Japanese Maple, 240mm



**Feeding:** Best to use a slow or controlled release type fertilizer like Osmocote from spring to autumn at the drip line. Using liquid fertilizer like Miracle Grow only during the first summer, and only to help establish the tree. Don't fertilize in the middle of the hot summer and 6 to 8 weeks after repotting!

**Repotting:** Suggested every one to two years in well drained soil, early spring is the best time. Don't repot and defoliate in the same year!

**Propagation:** Easy from seeds, semi ripe cuttings in summer and layering in early summer. Note - seeds from some cultivars are notoriously infertile!

**Pruning and wiring:** Maples will grow a very fine ramification when regularly pruned. Trim back shoots to two or three leaves, responds well to repeated pinching of new shoots and partial or total defoliation. Being apically dominant, growth will be strongest at the top - hard pruning and thinning out the top in late autumn or midsummer when wounds heal quickly will encourage growth in lower areas. Never prune in spring due to heavy 'bleeding', which can cause loss of branches - always seal the wounds!

Wiring from early spring before buds swelling to late autumn after leaf fall or

defoliation!

**Pests and diseases:** Aphids, mildew, root rot and branch dieback.

**Styles:** Informal and formal upright, broom style, single or multiple trunks, group plantings, rafts. In all sizes incl. Shohin, Mame and great for root over/in rock as well!

### Some varieties suitable for Bonsai:

Standard green Japanese maple. Also coralbark - Sango Kaku or Senkaki.

Red-leaved: Seigen, Chishio, Deshojo or Shindeshojo and Purpureum are more sensitive, weaker and slower growing than green leaved ones. Seigen and Chishio have feathery leaves.

Rough-Barked: Arakawa the most vigorous, light green leaves turning yellow in autumn.

Dwarf Cultivars: Kiyohime, Kashima and Mikawa Yatsubusa. All have branching and trunks. Due to dense foliage need more leaf thinning!

Dissectum-type feathery leaves: Seiryu is commonly available and quite strong.

Other cultivars used for bonsai: Okushimo, Aratama, Baby Lace, Beni Hoshi, Butterfly, Coonara Pygmy, Emerald Lace, Oridono Nishiki, and Shishigashira.

There's a great post about 'Refining a Japanese Maple' on AusBonsai from our Michael S. the 'Treeman'!  
<http://www.ausbonsai.com.au/forum/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=18223>



This picture is courtesy of Walter Pall! after



Maple leaves variety naturally small leaves, shoots,



Tiny leaves on the Okushimo cultivar