

Japanese Maple

Overview: Acer Palmatum are deciduous small trees and shrubs, with opposing odd-numbered (anything from 5-11) pointed leaves, native to Japan, China and Korea. There are at present hundreds of varieties in cultivation. They are very popular for use as bonsai due to their ready ability to respond to most bonsai techniques, beautiful foliage and graceful branch structure. Across the range of the species there is much variation in growth habit, leaf size, leaf shape and spring, summer and autumn colour. Varieties with a green summer leaf colour tend to be more robust whilst red-leaved varieties (though arguably more beautiful) lack the same quantities of chlorophyll in their leaves and are weaker. Flowers and key-shaped fruit tend to be insignificant and easily overlooked. The main problem with looking after Acer Palmatum is keeping the very thin leaves free of blemishes as they are easily burnt by the sun and wind.

Position Out of direct sunlight and strong winds throughout the year to protect leaves against sun and wind scorch. However good light in spring and autumn aides vigour and leaf-colour. **In**

winter, protect against frosts below -10°C. **Watering** Acer Palmatum are very thirsty prior to new flushes of growth in Spring and Summer and will need additional water. **Feeding** Feed weekly with high nitrogen fertiliser as soon as leaf buds open in spring to encourage strong growth and to strengthen leaves against sun and wind scorch. Withdrawing some early fertilising produces very short internodes and finer growth required on 'finished' or developed trees. After hardening off, feed fortnightly with a balanced feed. **Repotting** Every 1 or 2 years as buds extend in Spring until the tree is over 10yrs, then as necessary in a basic soil mix. **Pruning** Unless extension is required to form new areas of foliage or branches, cut new growth back to one or two pairs of leaves following bursts of growth through the growing season. For trees that require short internodes, buds can be pinched out leaving 2 new opposing leaves as soon as they are visible, this will produce fine, twiggly growth with short internodes and also promote back-budding. Remove all growth with long internodes. Leaf-cutting can be carried out in mid-summer, this results in smaller leaves, better ramification and stronger autumn leaf colour. However, defoliation should only be carried out on healthy trees, never in the same year as repotting, never 2 years running and never on weaker red-leaved varieties. Hard-pruning and formative pruning should be carried out in Autumn after leaf-fall (preferably within 1 week) or during the mid-summer semi-dormant period when wounds can heal very quickly. Never prune during Spring as all Acer species have a habit of bleeding profusely which can severely weaken the plant or even result in the loss of branches. Ensure all wounds are sealed. For trees that are displayed for their bare winter silhouettes, summer pruning might be considered.

