

Acer japonicum: Japanese Maple, Fullmoon Maple, Peacock Maple¹

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This document is part of a series originally written by Edward F. Gilman.

Introduction

Fullmoon maple is a small deciduous tree or large shrub that can reach between 10 to 30 feet in height and width, depending on cultivar selection (Figure 1). Fullmoon maple has a smooth, rounded canopy that fits well into a Japanese garden, due to its exotic silhouette. The deeply divided, soft green leaves have 9 to 11 lobes and are delicately displayed on thin, drooping branches. This plant receives its common name from the way in which the palmately lobed leaves are rounded, resembling the full moon. This plant's foliage takes on exceptional yellow to red fall coloration (coloration varies between cultivars), making this small, dense plant stand out in the landscape (Figure 2). The hanging clusters of showy purple to red flowers appear in late spring, and are followed by the production of winged seeds, called samaras (Figures 3 and 4). The flowers of *Acer japonicum* are showy compared to those of other maple (*Acer*) species. Many cultivars of this species exist, with variation in growth sizes, forms, and coloration of foliage.



Figure 2. Leaf, fall color—*Acer japonicum*: fullmoon maple.

Credit: anney_lier via Adobe Stock



Figure 3. Flower—*Acer japonicum*: fullmoon maple.

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Figure 1. Full form—*Acer japonicum* 'Vitifolium': 'Vitifolium' fullmoon maple.

Credit: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 4. Fruit—*Acer japonicum*: fullmoon maple.
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General Information

Scientific name: *Acer japonicum*

Pronunciation: AY-sir juh-PAW-nick-um

Common name(s): Japanese maple; fullmoon maple; peacock maple

Family: *Sapindaceae*

Plant type: tree; shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 4B through 7B (Figures 5 and 6)

Planting month for zones 4B, 5, 6: spring; fall

Planting month for zone 7: year-round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: near a deck or patio; container or above-ground planter; trained as a standard; bonsai; specimen

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

USDA Hardiness Zones 4B-7B

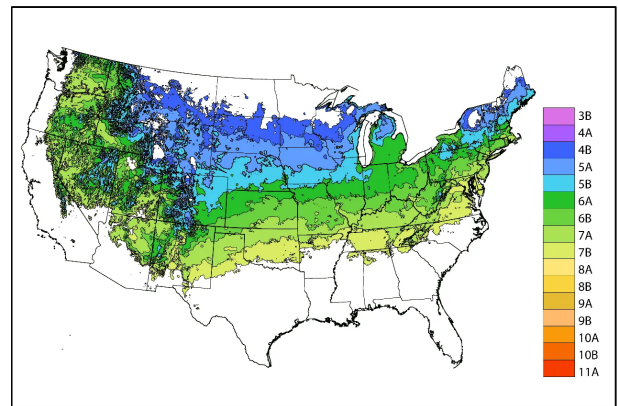


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 4B-7B.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

USDA Hardiness Zone 7B

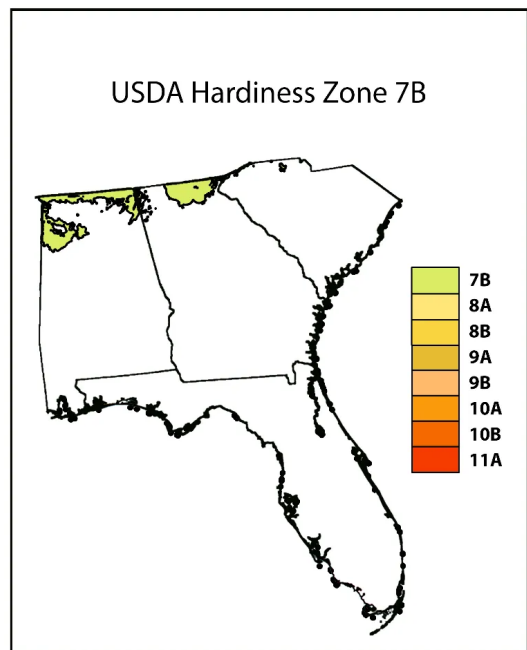


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zone 7B.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information. Credit: © kemurineko, some rights reserved (CC-BY-NC-SA) via iNaturalist

Description

Height: 10 to 30 feet; dependent upon cultivar selection

Spread: 10 to 30 feet; dependent upon cultivar selection

Plant habit: round

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: lobed; parted

Leaf shape: stellate or star-shaped

Leaf venation: palmate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: orange; yellow; red; purple; dependent upon cultivar selection

Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: red; purple

Flower characteristic: showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval

Fruit length: 1/2 to 1 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: green; red when mature

Fruit characteristic: showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: smooth gray bark; multi-trunked; interesting growth form; no thorns

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun; plant grows in partial shade; plant grows in the shade

Soil tolerances: acidic; well-drained; sand; loam; clay

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerance: unknown

Plant spacing: dependent upon cultivar selection

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Fullmoon maples can be grown in full sun to almost full shade. Where the sunlight is intense, utilizing a 2- to 3-inch-thick layer of mulch around the base of the tree and canopy is beneficial. Partial to full shade is preferable when planting in the southern limits of the USDA zones. This plant can grow in a variety of soil conditions; however, well-drained acidic soil is needed.

This plant is well suited for use in residential landscape as well as commercial settings. This tree is best used as a specimen, for example, planted near a patio or deck, to attract attention to an area.

There are hundreds of cultivars of Japanese maples in existence, with various growth habits and sizes, and an array of foliage shapes and colorations. Common cultivars in the trade include 'Vitifolium', which has less divided leaves and outstanding fall coloration; 'Acontifolium', which has narrow, deeply lobed leaves that are fern-like in appearance and has outstanding fall coloration; 'Green Cascade', which has a weeping and sprawling growth form.

Design Considerations

As a specimen plant, fullmoon maple should be located in the landscape to create a focal point. Background plants should have a simple form and full foliage to create a solid mass that highlights the form of the maple. Low-growing shrubs and groundcover plants with dark green, glossy leaves would contrast well with the light green foliage of the maple plant. Pair with plants with simple forms and fine texture, such as mounding grasses with narrow strap blades or the sprawling forms of juniper with fine needles. White and pink flowers of surrounding plants will highlight the purple/red flowers and red fall color of the foliage.

Pests and Diseases

No pests of major concern. Disease concerns include verticillium wilt.

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