

## Crabapple Trees

By Taun Beddes

Crabapple trees. The very name, for many, conjures childhood memories of endless raking and piles of rotting fruit. But what if I told you there's a world of crabapples beyond the messy kind?

As a child, the sprawling crabapple in our front yard was a source of beauty and frustration. Its springtime display of enormous pink blossoms was stunning. However, summer brought a different story. The tree produced many inch-wide fruits that fell over three weeks. The never-ending chore of cleaning them up and the inevitable arrival of stinky wasps left me with a strong dislike for crabapple trees for many years.

Fast forward, and my perspective took a complete turn. Working in the nursery industry and studying plants opened my eyes to the vast diversity of crabapple varieties. There's a whole category with "persistent fruit," meaning the fruit clings to the branches, providing a winter feast for our feathered friends. One delightful winter scene that plays out in my yard involves entire flocks of birds descending on my Royal Raindrops crabapples, devouring the fruit in a single sitting.

Beyond their visual appeal, crabapples are resilient. They thrive in Utah's alkaline soil and clay textures, blooming from mid-April to May. Those grown in places like Bear Lake bloom in June. Most crabapple trees reach a comfortable 20 feet in height and width over the years, but for those with limited space, there's a fantastic selection of dwarf forms.

Spring Snow, a popular choice, graces park strips and smaller yards with its fragrant white blossoms and lack of fruit. Prairiefire stuns with vibrant dark pink flowers and unique burgundy foliage, while Royal Raindrops offers a similar flower color with even darker red leaves. Newer stars like Marilee and Prairie Rose are gaining popularity. Marilee boasts white blossoms on a narrow 10-foot-wide frame, and Prairie Rose offers a delightful display of double, baby-pink blooms. It is mostly fruitless.

For those seeking more unique options, Raspberry Spear's narrow profile makes it perfect for fence lines or screens (like Raspberry Spear). Red Jade's weeping habit with arching branches adds a touch of whimsy, while Sargent Tina maintains a near-perfect globe shape, ideal for tiny spaces.

Most nurseries offer a selection of crabapples, with newer varieties often available in early to mid-spring. A quick internet search can help you find the perfect fit for your yard, transforming your space from childhood memory to backyard beauty. So, the next time you encounter a crabapple tree, remember that a whole world of possibilities is waiting to be explored.