



# METRO MAPLES

*March 2020 Newsletter*



## NEW TREES ARE HERE!

Springtime means new trees from our friends in Oregon!



## 'BABY DRAGON' SHANTUNG MAPLE

Our featured variety this month stands out as a top performer in Texas summers.



## FERTILIZATION

What to use, how much to use, when to apply it, and how come that is.

## NEW TREES ARE HERE!

An 18-wheeler full of over 300 awesome Japanese maples arrived this week from our suppliers in Oregon. We're always excited to get new trees, and this shipment was no exception. It's like Christmas in March. The farm is absolutely stuffed to the rafters with amazing trees, and many are already beginning to leaf out. You can see a freshly updated inventory list on our website.



If you are planning to add a Japanese maple (or 2 or 3) to your landscape this year, keep in mind that the earlier you can get those roots in the ground, the faster they can start growing in your soil and establishing themselves. More roots equal healthier plants that will have the strength to thrive in spite of the heat in July and August and September.

If you have any questions, or would like to make an appointment to come out during the week, please don't hesitate to give us a call at 817-797-3419.



This 'Baby Dragon' is 9 years old in this photo. The tree is about 12ft tall by 6ft wide. Photo credit: Keith Johansson.

## 'BABY DRAGON'

*Acer truncatum* 'Baby Dragon' was discovered by Metro Maples founder, Keith Johansson, in 1994, and has proven to be a terrific performer in even the hottest Texas summers.

'Baby Dragon' is a weeping dwarf Shantung maple that grows exceptionally well in full Texas sun and provides an excellent alternative to the more shade-loving weeping Japanese maple cultivars.

While Japanese maples will tend to slow their growth when temperatures regularly exceed 95 degrees, 'Baby Dragon' doesn't slow down at all, and will continue to push new leaves through September.

Like all maples, 'Baby Dragon' is deciduous, meaning its leaves will drop in December

and new leaves will begin to grow in March. The leaves emerge a purplish burgundy, but will change quickly to green. Fall color is a bright yellow with the occasional splash of red.

'Baby Dragon' is easily pruned into a variety of silhouettes. They can be trained up tall, thinned to provide a more layered and elegant look, and can even be grown as bonsai. The quick and steady growth rate makes this a very forgiving tree that recovers quickly from pruning and takes all manner of adversity in stride.



New growth is always red, but as the leaves mature they turn a bright green. 'Baby Dragon' will produce new foliage consistently throughout the growing season.



Keith Johansson trained this 'Baby Dragon' as a cascade-style bonsai.

We currently have trees in 2, 5, 7, and 15 gallon sizes available for purchase. Check the "Our Inventory" page of our website for more details!

## FERTILIZATION

We get a lot of questions on the subject of fertilizing maple trees. Since now is the optimal time to be fertilizing, we thought we'd go over some of the most frequently asked questions about "feeding" your trees.

1. *Should I fertilize my Japanese maple, and if so, when and with what?*

A: You can if you'd like to, but go easy.

B: Early spring (March or April)

C: A balanced slow-release fertilizer like Osmocote at half the recommended rate on the package.



A slow release fertilizer like Osmocote is much preferred to the "blue stuff."

2. *Can you please elaborate on all that?*

Sure. Japanese maples are slow growers, which makes them light feeders. They simply don't need, and can't process the nitrogen that your lawn does, or that you'd use on your vegetable garden.

That said, a little fertilizer can be a good thing in moderation. Japanese maples in North Texas will grow from March through early Summer, and usually slow down dramatically once the temperatures start to soar. It's understandable that we want to encourage as much growth in that narrow window as possible, so it's tempting to go a little heavier on the fertilizer. But, too much of a good thing can be really detrimental. Using a slow-release fertilizer will prevent you from overdoing it.



This very healthy tree was clearly not over-fertilized.

3. *What happens if I over-fertilize?*

Fast acting, high nitrogen fertilizers (like the blue stuff that works great on annuals and vegetables) can cause Japanese maples to dry out and look burned, and can cause rapid growth that is out of scale with the rest of the tree. The growth tends to be woodier, with long, thick growth that doesn't branch very often and has large gaps between oversized leaves. It's not very graceful, and honestly kind of weird looking.

4. *What if I'd rather use an organic fertilizer?*

We've had success with cottonseed meal and with fish emulsion with seaweed. Organics certainly have their benefits, but it can be harder to tell exactly how much is a proper dose. We tend to stick with the synthetics at the farm because they are easier to measure.

5. *What about root stimulator?*

Meh. Lots of products that are sold as root stimulator are really just a fast acting fertilizer that includes more phosphorus and potassium than nitrogen. We'd recommend just sticking with the slow release stuff, and count on the tree to do its thing in its own time.

6. *What about fertilizing 'Fire Dragon', 'Baby Dragon' and other Shantung Maples?*

These trees are much faster growing and so will welcome more fertilizer. You can use the same Osmocote you use on your Japanese maples (at the recommended rate on the package), or you can use the fertilizer spikes that you hammer into the soil around the drip line of the tree.

You can also fertilize them more often than the Japanese maples. An application in March, one in May, and one in September should be sufficient.

7. *My tree looks sickly. Should I fertilize it?*

Nope. Usually, the tree isn't missing any nutrients, so adding fertilizer has little to no effect, and often can actually make matters worse. The best approach is usually to hold off on fertilizing until the following year. What looks like a nutrient deficiency is most often the result of other stresses (e.g. poor drainage, damaged bark, herbicide damage, soil compaction, or inconsistent moisture).



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