

Crataegus phaenopyrum - Washington Hawthorn (*Rosaceae*)

Crataegus phaenopyrum is a highly ornamental, small tree of rounded to semi-pendulous habit at maturity. Washington Hawthorn has showy but malodorous late spring flowers, dark green summer foliage, burgundy late autumn color, late autumn and early winter red fruits, fine texture, lightly exfoliating bark, and dense twiggy, that also attracts wildlife. It often has rust as a severe disease problem with age.

Form



-slow to medium growth rate

Culture

-full sun to partial sun
-tolerant of poor soils, various soil pHs, compacted soils, drought, heat, and winter salt spray
-propagated by seeds and rooted cuttings
-Rose Family, with several diseases and pests, most notably various rusts that affect the stems, foliage, and fruit (especially the extremely common cedar hawthorn rust and cedar quince rust)
-abundantly available in clump (multi-trunk) or tree (single-trunk) forms, primarily in B&B form

Foliage

-emerging reddish, but quickly maturing to dark green and shiny on the upper leaf surface, while dull medium green on the lower leaf surface
-alternate, broadly ovate, about 2" long, with 3 major lobes, with the terminal lobe being much larger than the basal 2 lobes
-doubly serrated to incised on the margins, with cordate bases
-autumn color is burgundy to wine, occurring in late Oct. and into mid Nov., and attractive



Flowers

-white inflorescences (about 2" wide) blanket the tree in early June (it is the last of the landscape Hawthorns to flower), effective for 2 weeks and extremely malodorous

Fruits

-0.25" diameter green fruits are in pendulous clusters, turning to orange by Oct. then to bright red-orange in Nov., and often persisting into late Jan. (if not eaten by wildlife before then)
-clusters of many pendulous small red fruits make this one of the most attractive ornamental trees in early winter
-fruits are readily eaten by birds and squirrels



FEATURES

-small ornamental tree
-maturing at about 20' tall x 20' wide
-upright oval growth habit in youth, quickly becoming spreading rounded to arching mounded with age; often multi-trunked, densely branched, and twiggy with numerous thorns

-infections of various rusts create white-orange protuberances on the green fruits in summer (especially following wet springs), usually causing these infected fruits to abscise before autumn

Twigs

-thin twigs with small buds are red-brown and somewhat zigzag, changing to reddish-gray on the stems and branches
-the thorniness of the twigs shows great variation within the species
-very twiggy in appearance, and shedding small twigs continuously from self-shading

Trunk

-usually either multi-trunked or single-trunked and branching low, but sometimes single-trunked and limbed up into classic tree form
-bark exfoliates into thin strips to reveal a red-orange interior bark beneath a brown-gray exterior bark
-branches are sometimes prone to storm damage with age, a combination of the heavy fruit loads in autumn/winter (or ice loads that may accumulate on the thin but numerous twigs) and narrow crotch angles at some of the major branch junctures

USAGE

Function

-specimen, focal point, foundation, entranceway, border, street, group planting, or multi-season accent

Texture

-medium-fine in foliage and fine when bare
-thick density in foliage and when bare

Assets

-four-season ornamental tree with late spring white inflorescences, autumn red fruits and burgundy leaf color, and winter fruits and bark/twiggy texture
-urban tolerant
-wildlife attraction and refuge
-winter salt spray tolerant

Liabilities

-severe rust diseases (cedar hawthorn rust and cedar quince rust) may infect the plant yearly
-malodorous inflorescences in late spring
-thorns on lower branches that are at pedestrian level are a potential injury liability

Habitat

-Zones 3 to 8
-Native to the Southern U.S.

SELECTIONS

Alternates

-ornamental trees with good multi-season appeal (*Amelanchier arborea*, *Cornus kousa*, *Crataegus viridis* 'Winter King', *Malus*, etc.)
-trees or large shrubs serving as wildlife food sources and refuges (*Crataegus crusgalli*, *Malus sargentii*, *Viburnum prunifolium*, etc.)
Cultivars - Variants - Related species
-clump (multi-trunked) and tree (single-trunked) forms of the straight species are commonly available
***Crataegus* 'Vaughn'** - Vaughn Hawthorn - a hybrid between Cockspur Hawthorn (*C. crusgalli*) and Washington Hawthorn (*C. phaenopyrum*), more upright and less thorny than either of its parents, with abundant fruits of intermediate size, but of low commercial availability, noted for its salt spray tolerance, and effectively used as a street median or island parking lot tree in addition to the other functions noted above