

Pyracantha coccinea - Scarlet Firethorn (*Rosaceae*)

Pyracantha coccinea is an urban-tolerant shrub with spiny branches, showy white malodorous late spring inflorescences, broadleaf evergreen dense foliage, spire-like upper branches, and orange autumn fruits.

FEATURES

Form



- medium-sized to large-sized ornamental shrub
- species form matures at about 15' tall x 15' wide, but cultivars are usually smaller, and most shrubs are frequently pruned to smaller dimensions anyway
- upright oval growth habit in youth, becoming open,

straggly, and spreading

-medium growth rate (rapid rate if pruned back hard)

Culture

-full sun to partial shade

-very tolerant of urban conditions and adaptable to poor soils, compacted soils, soils of various pH, heat, drought, and heavy pruning

-propagated by seeds or rooted stem cuttings

-a number of minor disease and pest problems affect this plant, but the 2 major diseases are scab (primarily affecting the fruits) and fireblight (affecting the newly emergent leaves and stems)

-commonly available in the trade

-in moderate to severe zone 5 winters, the bronzed broadleaf evergreen foliage will "burn" or die

-best time to prune vigorously growing specimens or espaliers is either right after bloom (to set up flower buds and fruits for the following year) or in autumn or early spring (to gain firm control with heavy pruning, and forego flowering and fruiting for an entire year)

Foliage

-dark green, broadleaf evergreen to semi-evergreen, and becoming unattractively bronzed in winter

-densely alternate (clustered on the short spur shoots), lanceolate to narrow elliptical, and lightly serrated

Flowers

-white, somewhat malodorous, in late May to early June, as flat-topped to slightly curving 2-3" diameter inflorescences, derived from floral buds on the previous year's spur shoots

Fruits

-orange, orange-red, or yellow, depending upon cultivar

-heaviest ornamental fruiting occurs on unpruned shrubs of scab-resistant cultivars sited in full sun, and can be ornamentally outstanding in early autumn when contrasted against the dark green foliage

-maturing in Sept. as pendulous clusters from the numerous spur shoots, and usually persistent only into late autumn, before abscission or being eaten by wildlife

Twigs

-pubescent purple-green when emergent, changing to brown but often obscured by the dense foliage

-spines often terminate the spur shoots, with the spines also obscured by the dense foliage

Trunk

-multi-trunked, brown, and somewhat rough, but seldom noticed due to the low branching and evergreen foliage

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Function

-formal or informal thorny barrier hedge, visual screen, specimen, or wall espalier; often incorrectly used as a foundation shrub (where it gets too large)

Texture

-medium texture
-thick density

Assets

-showy autumn true-orange fruits (some forms are red-orange or yellow-orange)

-showy late spring white inflorescences

-broadleaf evergreen foliage

-dense spiny growth serves as a bird refuge and as a barrier to traffic

Liabilities

-many old and new cultivars are prone to unsightly and sometimes lethal fireblight and fruit scab

-inflorescences are somewhat malodorous

-spines are sharp and mostly hidden by the foliage

-unattractive bronzed foliage may "burn" or die in severe winters

-fruits are not persistent into winter

-most forms get far too large and spreading for the site in which they are located, and require frequent pruning to keep them in-bounds (which reduces flowering and fruiting the following year)

Habitat

-Zones 5 (or 6) to 9

-Native to Southern Europe

SELECTIONS

Alternates

-barrier shrubs/hedges with spines/thorns/prickles (*Acanthopanax sieboldianus*, *Berberis koreana*, *Berberis x mentorensis*, *Berberis thunbergii*, etc.)
-shrubs with ornamental autumn and winter fruits (*Aronia arbutifolia*, *Ilex verticillata*, *Myrica pennsylvanica*, *Rosa rugosa*, etc.)

Cultivars – Variants – Related species

-although many cultivars and a few species exist, primarily noted for their disease resistance, fruit color, relatively compact habit, and/or cold hardiness, most are still moderately to severely susceptible to fruit scab and foliage/stem fireblight; the most common in the nursery trade are:

-*Pyracantha coccinea* 'Kasan' - to 8' x 8', with red-orange berries, but susceptible to scab

-*Pyracantha angustifolia* 'Yukon Belle' - to 7' x 7', with orange fruits, probably the most hardy orange-berried form, but susceptible to scab and fireblight

-*Pyracantha* 'Gnome' - to 7' x 7', with orange berries, but susceptible to scab

-*Pyracantha* 'Gold Rush' - to 10' x 10', with orange-yellow fruits, resistant to scab, but only cold hardy to zone 7

-*Pyracantha* 'Mohave' - to 10' x 10', with orange-red berries, being both scab and fireblight resistant

-*Pyracantha* 'Navaho' - similar to 'Mohave', but maturing at 6' x 8'

