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NEWSLETTER

Pyracantha aka Firethorn

Pyracantha coccinea

Call it a plant for all seasons, call it a landscaper's dream, call it what you may, the hardy pyracantha has many outstanding qualities.

Identified as a vigorous ever green shrub, this versatile plant can be used as a hedge, a screen/barrier plant, a ground cover, or espaliers on walls and fences. It's estimated that it can grow from 6 to 20 feet in height and can spread approximately 10 feet.

Its dark green, glossy foliage is usually easily maintained (except for perhaps severe winters). During spring and early summer, its branches cluster with lacy-white, sweet-smelling flowers, much to the delight of bees. Fall and winter seasons see this plant in a profusion of red, red-orange, or orange berries which birds readily devour (although some firethorn species may have fruit with less bird appeal). Birds utilize pyracantha as a habitat and also are attracted to its dense branches for year-around cover and protection.

Very drought resistant, pyracantha prefers dry soil and full sun, but will tolerate partial shade. This plant can be pruned at almost any time of the year. Several varieties are available.

Drawbacks? A few. Regular pruning is needed to keep pyracantha under control. The name "firethorn" says much. Wear gloves when handling or pruning this plant; the thorns are sharp. There is a thornless variety available. Pyracantha is susceptible to fire blight, root rot, and scab.

When landscaping, note not to use this plant in a very small or densely planted area (or next to public walkways), as pyracantha needs SPACE in order to display its handsome and spectacular self.

Poisonous? No. A jelly tasting much like apple jelly can be made from pyracantha berries-the recipe is available from the Cooperative Extension Offices.

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