

Flowering Quince

Flowering quince is a group of three hardy, deciduous shrubs: *Chaenomeles cathayensis*, *Chaenomeles japonica*, and *Chaenomeles speciosa*. Native to eastern Asia, flowering quince is related to the orchard quince (*Cydonia oblonga*), which is grown for its edible fruit, and the Chinese quince (*Pseudocydonia sinensis*). Flowering quince is often referred to as Japanese quince (this name correctly refers only to *C. japonica*). Japonica is often used regardless of species, and flowering quince is still called Japonica by gardeners all over the world. The most commonly cultivated are the hybrid *C. superba* and *C. speciosa*, not *C. japonica*. Popular cultivars include 'Texas Scarlet,' a 3-foot-tall plant with red blooms; 'Cameo,' a double, pinkish shrub to five feet tall; and 'Jet Trail,' a white shrub to 3 feet tall.

Flowering quince is hardy to USDA Zone 4 and is a popular ornamental shrub in both Europe and North America. It is grown primarily for its bright flowers, which may be red, pink, orange, or white. The flowers are 1 to 2 inches in diameter, with five petals, and bloom in late winter or early spring. The glossy dark green leaves appear soon after flowering and turn yellow or red in autumn. The edible quince fruit is yellowish-green with reddish blush and speckled with small dots. The fruit is 2 to 4 inches in diameter, fragrant, and ripens in fall.

The Good

The beautiful blossoms of flowering quince

Flowering quince is an easy-to-grow, drought-tolerant shrub that does well in shady spots as well as sun (although more sunlight will produce better flowers). It is adaptable to many soil conditions and will even grow in heavy clay soil, as long as the pH is not too high. It is an extremely tough plant that will persist for years without pruning or serious insect or disease problems.



The beautiful blossoms of flowering quince

In addition to these desirable qualities, flowering quince is highly prized for its beautiful fragrant flowers, which it produces early in the year when most flowering plants are still sleeping. For two weeks, this otherwise ordinary shrub becomes a ravishing beauty, its brilliant blossoms perfuming the air with a lovely fragrance. For an even earlier show, branches can be brought indoors and forced into bloom in a vase.

The fruit of the flowering quince is also fragrant and is sometimes used for making jelly, marmalade, and preserves, as it contains more pectin than apples and real quinces. The fruit also has more vitamin C than lemons!

The foliage of flowering quince turns yellow to red in the fall, providing color to the landscape. By virtue of its thorny dense growth habit, flowering quince is an excellent choice for an effective security barrier or to discourage foot traffic. It can be espaliered and is also suitable for cultivation as bonsai.

Flowering quince is used as a food plant by the larvae of some butterflies, and the flowers attract bees. Because it blooms so early, flowering quince is an important food for hummingbirds and will bring the birds to your yard before you even get your feeders out of storage.

The Bad



Ouch!

By now you may be ready to run out and purchase a flowering quince. But wait! There's a (small) cloud around this silver lining. Those beautiful flowers? They last for only a couple weeks-most of the year flowering quince is a scraggly, shrubby tangle of thorny branches and unremarkable foliage. And because of the denseness of the twiggy stems, it may even collect windblown debris that will be difficult to remove. The branches have rather long thorns, which are very sharp. The plant will most likely put up shoots from the ground, and continue to do so long after you think you've cut it down.

The fruit is very hard, astringent, bitter, and unappetizing to eat raw. And the fruit is usually produced in such small quantities that there won't normally be enough to make even one jar of jelly.

Although flowering quince is quite disease free, it may develop fungal diseases in hot weather, resulting in early defoliation; often only a few leaves remain by August.

The Ugly

What could be ugly about a shrub with such beautiful flowers? The plant itself, for one. For most of the year, flowering quince is a crowded mass of thin, thorny branches with plain bark. And the suckers that come up all around the main plant aren't very appealing either. Most gardeners would consider the thorns to be ugly as well (they are very sharp!). The fruit is roundish and yellow and rather unattractive-not suitable for display with other fruit.

Flowering quince is often dismissed by gardeners because it has such a short flowering period. But, if you have a dry corner or an area with heavy soil and want a shrub that will be virtually maintenance free and will most likely outlive you, flowering quince is a good choice.



Suckers may be a problem.

Resources

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