

ABUTILON

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The Flowering Maple is a showy plant with striking flowers. It is a member of the genus *Abutilon* which contains about 90 species. These are tropical or semi-tropical plants widely distributed as herbs, shrubs, or rarely trees in the warm temperate regions of all continents except Europe (Chitlerdon, 1951). They are members of the Mallow Family (Malvaceae) and many species produce numerous, long-lasting beautiful blossoms which are usually bell or lantern-shaped.

The flowers are five-petalled in varying shades of red, yellow, or white. Some are veined with a darker color. The stamens of each flower are indefinite and clustered with the styles in an exserted head or column which provides for an interesting flower form. Some species are erect, tree-like and handsome; some are pendulant or loosely vining; and others resemble miniature maple trees in form and leaf.

Abutilons may be grown as house plants and, as such, treated like geraniums or fuchsias, being placed outdoors in the summer and brought indoors when the weather becomes cold. They are valuable plants for the house, greenhouse, or conservatory, and are suited for use in hanging baskets or the summer bedding garden. Their cultivation is simple. They prefer a night temperature of 50 to 60°F. (Graf, 1974--Wyman, 1971), full exposure to light and frequent watering. An ideal soil might be 2 parts loam, 2 parts peat moss, 1 part leaf mold, and 1 part sand, amended with limestone and super-

phosphate but they will tolerate any reasonable soil mix so long as thorough drainage is provided. They need an abundance of water but require a well aerated soil. Vermiculite, perlite or calcined clay would be good soil amendments to improve drainage.

Some of the forms are grown primarily for bloom, and they are practically continuous-flowering when well-handled. The variegated leaved forms are grown for foliage and often used for bedding plants outdoors. Abutilons make good pot plants if kept within bounds by pinching so they will branch. In the border some species may reach 6-8 feet but in pots they seldom grow more than 3-4 feet (Beckett, 1974).

The Abutilons most often seen in American homes, gardens, and conservatories are of the species *Abutilon x hybridum*, typical of the numerous hybrids of the tropical American species *A. striatum*, *A. pictum*, and *A. darwinii*. These hybrids are a floriferous group of herbaceous shrubs with pubescent soft green foliage varying from lobed to not lobed. Some forms are: Arthur Belsham, red, shaded gold; Apricot, salmon flowers with darker red veining; Boule de Neige, pure white, very free; Golden Fleece, golden yellow; Golden Bell, deep yellow, free-flowering; Royal Scarlet, rich stunning scarlet; Santana, deep red; Savitzii, dwarf with white edged foliage, useful for bedding; Snowstorm, semi-dwarf, pure white; Splendens, bright red; and Erecta, pink with orange veination, erect (Bailey, 1943). *Abutilon megapotamicum* has slender drooping branches with arrow-shaped leaves. The flowers are lemon-yellow, small and pendulous with a lantern-like red calyx. *A. megapotamicum variegatum* has leaves blotched attractively with bright yellow. Both are suitable for hanging baskets. Some of the taller species such as *A. darwinii*

and *A. venosum* can be useful for training under greenhouse roof rafters or as pillar plants.

Propagation is by cuttings or seeds. Cuttings may be made in the spring of new wood from old plants that have been cut back, or they may be taken in the fall. As the Abutilon is active practically all year, cuttings may be taken almost any time. Seeds grow readily but will require six to eight months to produce blooming plants. Bedding material is raised from early stuck cuttings (Bailey, 1943).

A virus disease called "infectious chlorosis" causes a variegation or mosaic of the foliage, but since the variegated forms are considered ornamentally desirable, the disease is intentionally fostered and transmitted by budding or grafting chlorotic stock on normal green plants. Another type of chlorosis may be transmitted by seeds.

Leaves showing irregular brown spots should be removed and destroyed. So should entire plants if they show these signs of Fusarium wilt or signs of Rhizoctonia stem rot.

Infestations of soft scale, mealy bugs, and white fly may also occur (Seymour, 1970). For pest control methods see the Connecticut Greenhouse Newsletter #86, June 1978.

The Flowering Maple is easily grown and will survive under adverse conditions. It is an interesting addition to any plant collection.

References

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