

Fireworks in autumn

Fireworks started this week. I'm not talking about the firecrackers we see on the Fourth of July. I'm talking about the mountainash berries turning orange. Magnificent!

Mountainash is famous for its radiant fruits, but this tree is a four-season wonder (Figs. 1–5).

In spring, frilly white flowers adorn the tree. In summer, the tree shows off its lustrous coat of green leaves. This foliage turns golden in fall, but you probably won't notice it because of the eye-catching fruits.

The berry clusters may last through winter, adding a welcome splash of color to the dreary winter landscape. As an added bonus, the fruits attract lively birds to our yards in winter and early spring. Even the tree's bark is attractive!

Mountainash is a beautiful tree, but it is temperamental. It demands a cool, moist and well-drained soil. It will not tolerate the heat of the urban concrete jungle and it struggles in saline soil. An east-facing location that gets the morning sun is ideal.

You can show your love to this tree by mulching it with shredded bark to keep its roots cool. Keep the mower away from its delicate bark. Wrap the bark during the first few winters to protect it from sunscald.

The rosy red fruits of Korean mountainash (*Sorbus alnifolia*) persist through the winter. Hardy to Zone 4, it is considered superior to the far more common European mountainash (*S. aucuparia*). 'Black Hawk' and 'Cardinal Royal' are recommended European types; both are hardy in Zone 3. Showy mountainash (*S. decora*) is native to the Midwest. This scarlet-fruited species may be the hardiest and most adaptable of the group.



Figs. 1–5. Its rich orange clusters are striking, but mountainash adds color to the landscape all year. Its creamy white blossoms, lustrous green foliage, golden fall color, and silvery bark are magnificent. The colorful fruits may persist all winter and attract birds in early spring.

Written by Tom Kalb, Extension Horticulturist, North Dakota State University.

Source:

Dirr, M. 2009. Manual of woody landscape plants: Their identification, ornamental characteristics, culture, propagation and uses. 5th ed. Stipes Publishing: Champaign, IL.

Photos were made available under Creative Commons licenses specified by the photographers: 1. Dave_S., www.flickr.com/photos/david_e_smith/7782739326/; 2. Bernt Rostad, www.flickr.com/photos/brostad/3584207299/; 3. Peter Stevens, www.flickr.com/photos/nordique/6281398745/; 4. Sharon Brogen, www.flickr.com/photos/sbmontana/421895592/; 5. Jeremy Hiebert, www.flickr.com/photos/jeremyhiebert/8259611037/.