



BEESON'S
McHenry County
Nursery, Inc.

Nursery News

July 2008 - Research & Development

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Hawthorns - The Wild Ones

Hawthorns are a group of small trees that grow in the temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere. In the Midwest, they are grown commercially for ornamental trees, street trees, and natural areas. There are many species, but most are dense, somewhat wild looking small trees.

Adaptability:

Hawthorns are very adaptable trees, and well suited to growing in both tough natural areas and tough urban sites.

- Tolerate most soils, including alkaline
- Grow well in sun or partial shade
- Tolerate drought and some wet
- Average size root system
- Tolerate road salt

Drought tolerance:

Hawthorns are excellent trees for water-conservation

- Deep taproot
- Not heavy feeders
- Adapted to this climate
- Small thick leaves with reflective surface to retain moisture (see [Drought So Bad Trees Chase Dogs](#))

Wildlife Benefits:

Hawthorns provide food and shelter for many species of wildlife.

- The flowers are a source of nectar for many insects.
- Larvae of many Lepidoptera species eat the leaves.
- Berries are food for birds and animals in winter when other food is scarce.
- The dense habit (and thorns!) provide shelter and protection.



Armed to the Teeth:

Most hawthorns come equipped with thorns. These long sharp thorns range from 1 to 5 inches in length.



A Fragrance only a Fly would Love:

In June, hawthorn flowers appear with five white petals around bright pink stamens. The scent of the flowers is rich and strong, and attracts a buzzing cloud of insect pollinators. The scent is interesting, slightly sweet and slightly rotten, and not necessarily nice.



Fruitful:

Flowers turn to green berries that ripen to a shiny red and hang in clusters on the tree. Birds and small animals eat them (and help spread the seed).

The fruit is also edible to humans and has been used in a number of ways. Berries have been used raw or cooked (contains pectin which works well in jellies and preserves) or dried for medicinal use.



Tough and Hardy:

Hawthorns are very tough trees. Most of the problems that can occur are merely cosmetic (similar to others plants in the Rose family). Cedar apple rust and hawthorn rust can be a problem if the alternate host is nearby.



Taxonomic Confusion

Depending on whom you ask, there are hundreds to a thousand different species of hawthorn. This confusion stems from the tendency towards apomixis (asexual reproduction) and unusual chromosome numbers in hawthorn.

Often the embryo develops without fertilization and seeds are genetic clones of the parent plant (see also [Serviceberry - A Sweet Sign of Spring](#) at www.beesongrows.com/ArchivePage.html). In these cases, species and hybrids are 'true to seed', even if there is another species nearby to cross-pollinate (they can cross if weather and pollination is right, adding interesting hybrids and more confusion to the mix).

As interesting new specimens were found, they proved to be true to seed and were thought to be a separate species.

Inquiries or more information is available by contacting **McHenry County Nursery Green Tech** Mary McClelland
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Hawthorn at McHenry County Nursery

What's in a name?

Crataegus-

"hardness", referring to the wood, which is fine grained and used for inlays and carvings. The wood of the roots is even finer and can be used for small delicate projects. In rural areas of the U.S., hawthorn wood was often used to make tool handles and fence posts.

Hawthorn-

"thorny hedge", from 'haw', an old English word for "hedge" These dense thorny trees were commonly used as hedgerows before barbed wire was available. Fruits are also known as "haws".

Cockspur Hawthorn- *Crataegus crusgalli*

Latin for cock's spur: "crus" - leg or shank and "gallus" - cock or rooster. Refers to the large hooked thorns

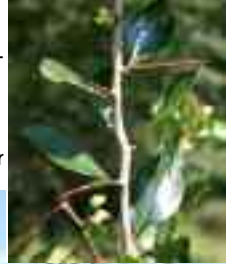
Fruit: Long lasting fruit

Foliage: Glossy thick leaves, nice reddish fall color

Form: Horizontal growth

Flowers: Profuse

Bark: Shaggy exfoliating bark, gray
Cockspur has the longest thorns- up to 3", *C. crusgalli inermis* is thornless.



Washington Hawthorn- *Crataegus phaenopyrum cordata*
phaenopyrum: having an appearance of pear (pyrus), Greek, referring to the similar flowers, cordata: "heart shaped"

Fruit: Small bright fruits, persistent

Foliage: Glossy thin but firm leaves, Orange to scarlet fall color

Form: Upright growing, dense, good for narrow planting areas

Flowers: Flowers later than other hawthorn

Bark: Gray peeling bark

Less susceptible to rust and many leaf diseases



Winter King Green Hawthorn-

Crataegus viridis 'Winter King'

viridis: "green", referring to the shiny green foliage

Fruit: Large, not heavy every year, persistent, eaten by birds (cedar waxwing)

Foliage: Glossy leaves, reddish purple fall color

Form: Dense, nearly vase shaped

Flowers: Early flowering, yellow stamens

Bark: Silver gray exfoliating to reveal orange patches

Species from river bottomlands and coastal plains



Downy or Red Hawthorn- *Crataegus mollis*

Mollis: "smooth", or with soft velvety hair- referring to the fuzzy leaves

Fruit: Large and edible, wildlife eat fruit after falls and softens

Foliage: Larger leaves than most hawthorn, golden fall color

Form: One of the larger growing, horizontal branching

Flowers: Early blooming

Bark: Gray twisting bark, slightly peeling

Native to US, found in the Midwest in the savanna understory and along prairie edges



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