

# Plant Talk

OCTOBER 2011

## Welcome

*Introduction by Mike Yanny*

Welcome to the new Johnson's Nursery E-newsletter. I will be your host for this adventure, as long as you and Johnson's will have me.

I have been working at Johnson's Nursery for 31 years now. I've learned a lot, made lots of mistakes, and have been fortunate not to be fired over that considerable amount of time. You see, sometimes I have a tendency to talk a little too much, like the first year I was at the nursery.

Johnson's hired me back in 1980 to be a propagator as well as to help with harvesting (digging), sales, and writing marketing materials among other things. I was 23 and I could do it all, or so I told them, and so they thought. My problem was I talked a little too much.

One weekend in 1980, this lady came into the nursery to look at plants. She said she worked at the Horticulture Extension office answering questions from the general public (probably a master gardener). She really liked plants and wanted me to show her a whole list of them that she had brought with her. I liked talking about plants, too; so, I showed her each one on the list of about 25 plants and had a long involved discussion about each one. It was fun! She enjoyed it as well and said she learned a lot. I felt pretty good about it as she left after our little four and a half hour tour.

It turns out that she didn't buy anything which hadn't really entered my mind as being necessary because we were talking about *really cool* plants.

Anyway, that was the last day I ever worked in sales at Johnson's. They didn't fire me, even though I think they considered it. I may have talked a little too much that day.



*Mike Yanny*

The point I'm trying to get to here is that we may have finally found a way, after 30 years of trying, to make all of my talking benefit the nursery instead of just sucking up labor dollars.

It's called marketing with the computer. I can talk to a lot of people this way!

And you, ladies and gentlemen, are my target. Hopefully thousands of you, or hundreds of you, or 20-30 of you, or a few of you will be interested in *Plant Talk*. Here goes...

### Get More Mike!

Any of you that would like to talk to me about crabapples or any other plant subjects, please feel free to e-mail me at [mike@johnsonsnursery.com](mailto:mike@johnsonsnursery.com). I am planning on getting a blog set up in the near future. That should allow us to have as much discussion as you could possibly stand. Remember, I really like to talk!!!

# Crabapples for the Birds

by Mike Yanny

I'm sure there are some of you out there that are thinking, "Ya crabapples are for the birds, and not for me. They have the disease problems (scab) that knocks the leaves off the trees by August and the big, stinking fruit that drops all over the sidewalk that causes me to have to go out and rake them instead of watching the Packer game."

Well, all I can say to people like you is this-- go get a beer, put on your 2011 Super Bowl champion T-shirt, and finish reading this article!!!

I ain't talking about crappy crabapples here! I'm talking about trees without those problems. Ones that are truly for the birds to feed on. Ones that all of us can commune with in a natural, "kumbaya" sort of way. These are the trees that bring us together. Cedar Waxwings, robins, cardinals, and an occasional squirrel, are all attracted to these trees. It's a wonderful thing to be able to watch the trees come alive with beautiful natural birds pecking away at tiny fruits. You see, the best ornamental crabapple trees on the market today have little fruits that soften at various times throughout the season from fall through early spring. If a person wants, he or she can plant a mixture of various cultivars to feed the birds all through our leafless seasons.

Crabapple fruit preference by birds seems to be determined by the size and the hardness of the fruit. The various cultivars typically become soft after a series of frosts in the fall and winter. Some become soft rather quickly. *Malus baccata* 'Jacki', *Malus* 'Harvest Gold', *Malus* 'Cinderella', *Malus* 'Louisa', *Malus sargentii*, and *Malus sargentii* 'Tina' are examples of trees that are eaten first by the birds in mid to late autumn.

Trees that have delayed softening and provide bird food in late fall and into mid-winter include: *Malus* 'Harvest Gold', *Malus* 'Mary Potter', *Malus* x *zumi* 'Calocarpa', and *Malus* 'Anne E'.



*Golden Raindrops® Crabapple has abundant clusters of tiny, golden-yellow fruits that are eaten by birds in fall.*



The cultivars whose fruit softens in late winter often times provide a little pick me for the birds. I guess you could call it a little extra toot for the snoot, as the fruits will have a bit of alcohol in them. It's fun to watch! Two of these cultivars are 'Bob White' and 'Sentinel'.

Two cultivars that I know of have fruits that soften very unevenly are 'Birdland' and 'Ormiston Roy'. These trees feed the birds from mid-autumn all the way into spring. I would say they are the ultimate in crabapples for the birds.

A common misconception in the trade that yours truly had fallen prey to earlier in his career is that all small fruited crabapples are taken by the birds. This is not true. *Malus* 'Donald Wyman', *Malus* 'Red Jewel', 'Firebird' Crabapple, and 'Adams' Crabapple are cultivars that retain their fruit all through winter. The birds, for the most part leave them alone. The little crabapples drop from the trees before flowering in spring. These are still among the finest ornamental crabapple trees for fruit color persistence in the winter. It's just that they are not good plants for attracting birds or for

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## Crabapples for the Birds continued

siting in areas where fruit drop is not acceptable (in lawn areas they are fine—not by walkways or patios).

The list I have compiled to the right is by no means comprehensive, but is a start in helping you plan ornamental crabapple use for attracting birds. I will add to the list as I make more observations of the newer cultivars in our line.



*Robin in crabapple tree*

### **Early Season (October - November)**

Jack Siberian Crabapple  
Cinderella Crabapple  
Golden Raindrops® Crabapple  
Louisa Crabapple  
Mary Potter Crabapple  
Sargent Crabapple  
Tina Crabapple

### **Mid Season (December - January)**

Anne E. Crabapple  
Mary Potter Crabapple  
Prairifire Crabapple  
Professor Sprenger Crabapple  
Profusion Crabapple  
Redbud Crabapple

### **Late Season (February - March)**

Bob White Crabapple  
Harvest Gold® Crabapple  
Sentinel Crabapple  
Sugar Tyme® Crabapple

### **Full Season (October - March)**

Birdland Crabapple  
Ormiston Roy Crabapple



*Top: The fruit of Golden Raindrops® is squishable, perfect for birds to enjoy.  
Right: Ormiston Roy Crabapple fruit*



*Left: Prairifire Crabapple fruit  
Bottom: Tina Crabapple fruit*

