



Pyracantha coccinea

Firethorn is a large, evergreen shrub that is cherished for its spectacular fall and winter display of scarlet fruits and ability to withstand dry and droughty conditions. Shooting long lanky stems in all directions, firethorn typically grows into a tangled mound up to 10 ft (3.1 m) in height and 12 ft (3.7 m) wide. It is armed with sharp thorns that hide among the dark, glossy green leaves. Clusters (corymbs) of small white flowers appear in spring. These are up to 2 in (5 cm) across and are borne close together creating the appearance of nearly solid surface of flowers. In fall the 1/4 in (0.6 cm) berries begin to ripen, their color mellowing from green to shades of red, orange, or yellow. These persist through winter and into early spring depending on climate and appetite of the local bird population. Under bright sunny conditions the berries are plentiful but expect smaller crops in shadier situations. The color of both leaves and berries tends to be darker in cooler climates.

Firethorn is very fast growing and cultivars and hybrids are available that may be considerably more compact or otherwise differ in form from than the species. These also vary by form, fruit color and hardiness. 'Mohave' is dense, grows to about 12 ft (3.7 m) high and has red berries. 'Orange Glow' is more open in form with vivid orange berries. 'Lalandei' is a large upright selection that can grow to 20 ft (6.1 m) that produces huge quantities of scarlet fruits.

Location

Firethorn (*Pyracantha coccinea*) is native within a range extending from southern Europe to Caucasus Mountains in western Asia.

Usage

Pyracantha is often used as an espalier. Held flat against a wall, it can be shaped quite creatively. Because of its fast growth rate, sprawling, spreading habit, and ease of care, it can be used on slopes to great advantage requiring little maintenance or care. The wide-reaching stems may be pruned back as needed during warm weather as the shrub blooms on old wood. Even consider using it as an informal hedge! This will require some trimming and shaping for the first few years but the effort will produce impressively beautiful and secure (thorny) hedges.

Landscapers love the firethorns for their fast rate of growth and ability to withstand drought and neglect. The shrubs ruggedness and disease and pest resistance makes this plant a very popular item in commercial landscapes.

Features

The prolific flowers are lovely to behold and have some fragrance (although not all would agree that it is appealing). Birds, especially cedar waxwings, like the plump, colorful berries. The brilliant berry-laden branches of pyracantha hold up extremely well in cut arrangements and add interest and color to wreaths.