Chaenomeles x superba 'Mandarin'

Gary L. Koller

A superior cultivar of a robust, long-time favorite is offered for trial.

The flowering quince is an extremely tough shrub that's available in a wide range of colors. Blooming before its leaves appear, so early in spring that it very nearly has the garden to itself, the plant is also grown for its dense habit. It is a genus of only three species, but they occur in an astonishing number of varieties. In 1963, when Claude Weber undertook to examine and list the cultivars of all species and hybrid groups, she uncovered 550. In aid of the overwhelmed horticulturist, she offered a shorter list of 234, classified by color—white, white-and-pink, pink, orange, and red. These she further narrowed to 41 for special commendation.

From this large company, we have singled out one cultivar, Chaenomeles x superba 'Mandarin'. Each of its single flowers radiates a saturated reddish-orange, the Mandarin red that gave it its name, but what makes this plant even more distinctive is the disease resistance of its foliage. Many flowering quinces drop their leaves in summer, but 'Mandarin' retains a full complement of lustrous green foliage till frost. Characteristically, the plant takes a nicely rounded shape. Its rich foliage combined with full branching makes it an ideal low-maintenance shrub, useful as a hedge in itself or as a member of a varied group of plants.

Its yellow-green fruits, which ripen in autumn, are lightly fragrant and ovoid or obovoid in shape, something like a small, gnarled apple. They are edible and can be used to make jams.

'Mandarin' originated as a seedling at the Clarke Nursery Company in San Jose, California, where it was selected for introduction into the trade in 1947. Two small grafted plants arrived at the Arnold Arboretum in 1950. One of these (accession #281-50) has been growing in its present location in the Bradley Collection of Rosaceous Plants since 1958 at least. This winter, as the plant approaches the age of forty-five, it has grown to about eight feet in height and by the rooting of its ground-level branches has spread to a breadth of fifteen feet.

Size may limit the use of 'Mandarin' in very small gardens, but it should be ideal for larger gardens or for institutional, commercial, and park plantings. 'Mandarin' is quickly established and if planted two or three feet apart, in a few growing seasons it will simulate a thicket that's showy in flower and forms a thorny year-round barrier to direct pedestrian traffic.

Quinces grow well in almost any well-drained, even droughty, acid soil. They will tolerate rocky soils, exposure to moderate amounts of salt spray, and even, it seems, atmospheric pollution. Full sun is required for optimal flowering and fruit production, but moderate shade is tolerated. The northern limit of cold hardiness is not yet fully established, but 'Mandarin' should prove hardy to at least -10 degrees F. Plants damaged in winter storms benefit from renewal pruning immediately following flowering.

At the Arnold Arboretum, we have successfully repropagated 'Mandarin' by cuttings,
Chaenomeles x superba 'Mandarin', photographed by the author. Its flowering season can be extended from late winter to early spring by forcing cut branches for indoor display.
which avoids the understock suckering that can occur in grafted material. Reproduction from cuttings is vastly more cost efficient from a commercial viewpoint, resulting in less costly plants for gardeners. Softwood cuttings are treated with IBA (indolebutyric acid) or KIBA (potassium salt of indolebutyric acid), stuck in a mixture of equal parts of sand and perlite, and misted intermittently until rooting. The Bradley Collection includes two replications from the original plant, one from hardwood cuttings taken in March 1983, the other from softwood cuttings taken in July of the same year. In general, the success rate with softwood cuttings is close to 100 percent while with hardwood it is closer to 10 percent.

‘Mandarin’ is well worth growing, not only as a brilliant addition to the early spring garden, but for its proven track record of problem-free performance.

Literature

Gary Koller is Senior Horticulturist at the Arnold Arboretum and Lecturer in the Department of Landscape Architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

The Arnold Arboretum is pleased to offer plants of Chaenomeles x superba ‘Mandarin’ to our Friends. They were propagated from rooted cuttings and are generally 12 to 18 inches tall. Donation, payable upon receipt of plants, is $20.00 per plant. Shipment will be in the spring of 1994.

Spring Plant Distribution, Dana Greenhouse
The Arnold Arboretum, 125 Arborway, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130