

crazy about
CRABAPPLE TREES



by Maxine Paetro

In the autumn of 1995, I had an idea for small scrap of land at the bottom of my driveway. It is a weedy patch with partial sun, but I imagined it becoming a woodland garden -- all pastel colors under dappled shade. I told Tim Steinhoff, my friend and horticulturalist, that I was crazy about crabapples and he suggested his favorite variety, "tea crabs" (*malus hupehensis*). Two weeks later, we planted three sturdy, young, eight-footers in a triangle, twenty feet apart.

Beds were prepared and the trees were under-planted with rhododendrons and azaleas, all of which failed because there wasn't enough light. But, the weeds thrived. Formidable clumps of burdock and stands of garlic mustard grew as thick as thieves.

I hated those weeds, but, I learned from them. By partially obscuring my view of the garden, I saw where shrubs and paths could go to create mystery and a dramatic effect.

The weeds were rooted out at the end of the season, and in time, my low-growing native American wildflowers took hold: Trillium, Virginia bluebells, ostrich and cinnamon ferns. A dozen assorted viburnums, clethera and hollies added heft and height and extended the flowering season.

The tea crabs pinned down the beds in the new secret garden and when they bloomed in May, their branches held clouds

of delicate blossoms. The trees grew steadily to their full twenty-foot height, knitting a delicate canopy over the garden. Rustic furnishings and a picnic pavilion finished this satisfying Spring scene. It rained today and petals fell, showers of pale pink confetti.

Crabapple trees come in standard and dwarf size and with blossoms ranging in color from bridal white to deep magenta. Terry Ettinger, a horticultural consultant in Syracuse, New York, has done the hard job of picking the best sixteen varieties for our area. www.tlehcs.com

Broccoli Hall will be open on the Garden Conservancy's Open Days Program two Saturdays, May 16 and June 13. See pages 9, 10 & 12 for details.

Come and sit under the crabapple trees.

Maxine Paetro is a writer who gardens in Amenia, New York. Her web site is www.BroccoliHall.com. She co-writes the best-selling Women's Murder Club series with author, James Patterson. Their most recent work is the 8th Confession.

Photographer Jennifer May's photographs have appeared in the New York Times, Gourmet, People, and many other publications. See more of her work at jennifermay.com.



photo by Jennifer May