

From Quince It Comes

By Carolyn R. Casey, Fairfax Master Gardener

Flowering Quince and Common Quince make delicious edible additions to your garden that attract hummingbirds and butterflies. They not only provide you with beautiful, showy spring flowers but also fruit that can be used to make preserves and jellies.

Flowering Quince (*Chaenomeles speciosa*) is a tough and hardy shrub that has thorns. It is a deciduous broadleaf upright shrub in the Rosacea family and native to China. It is a fast and easy-to-grow shrub in areas with well-drained soil and medium moisture. Mature plants are mildly drought tolerant. It tolerates lots of soil conditions, except alkaline soils, and likes acidic, sandy, loam or clay soil with a pH of 3.7 to 7.0. Chlorosis occurs in soils with a high pH. It also tolerates extreme hot and cold temperatures and will grow in Zones 4 to 9.



photo: Washington State University

Flowering Quince

Flowering Quince blooms in March and April with a showy abundance of gold yellow, green or red burgundy flowers that have four to five petals and bloom for 10 to 14 days. It produces more blooms when planted in the sun but will tolerate shade. The flowers can be either single or double blooms that are 1.5 inches (4 cm) in diameter and appear before the foliage. Early spring frosts may damage the flower buds. The foliage is also gold yellow, green or red burgundy in color.

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Flowering Quince Cultivars

Toyo-Nishiki' (*Chaenomeles speciosa*) is known as Flowering Quince or Japanese Quince. This suckering shrub has a rounded and spreading shape that grows 5 to 10 feet (1.5 – 3 m) high and wide. It blooms with a unique combination of red, white and pink flowers, and all three colors may appear on the same flower. It grows in Zones 5 to 9.

'Double Take' Flowering Quince shrubs are now classified as *Chaenomeles lagenaria* and formerly were *Chaenomeles speciosa*. These varieties are thornless and fruitless with double flowers that resemble Camellias. They bloom from February to April in Zones 5 to 9. They grow 4 to 5 feet (1.2–1.5 m) tall and 4 to 6 feet (1.4–2 m) wide and frequently rebloom in the fall. 'Scarlet Storm,' 'Pink Storm' and 'Orange Storm' are members of the 'Double Take' Flowering Quince family. 'Scarlet Storm' has big velvety, dark red flowers with a 2.5 inch diameter and 17 to 25 petals per flower. 'Pink Storm' has large double salmon or coral flowers that are 2 inches in diameter that look like sweetheart roses. 'Orange Storm' has large bright orange double blooms with 31 to 49 petals per flower.



Toyo-Nishiki quince

photo: Creative Commons BY 2.0 –JC Raulston Arboretum

In 1822, John Lindley created the genus *Chaenomeles* to distinguish the Flowering Quince, which has stamens in two rows, from Common Quince (*Cydonia*) with stamens in one row and a different fruit anatomy. An easier way to distinguish these genera is that *Chaenomeles* is usually planted as an ornamental shrub with showy flowers, whereas Common Quince (*Cydonia oblonga*) is grown for its fruit.

Common Quince

Common Quince is a deciduous grafted tree in the Rosaceae family. It originates from Asia Minor and is usually self-pollinated. However, some believe the flowers may need cross pollination to produce good fruit. It has branches that are twisted and crowded and have an irregular shape. It has beautiful white or pink flowers that bloom in the spring. The foliage is a deep green that has a smooth upper surface and hairy lower surface.

They have been used as dwarfing rootstock for European pear trees. Comice pear trees grafted with Quince rootstock bear fruit at a younger age and produce regular crops with good-sized quality fruit. When Quince rootstock is grafted with Bartlett or Bostic pear, there is poor compatibility.

At first, the Common Quince fruit is covered with dense grayish white hairs that disappear as the fruit ripens. The fruit is a golden yellow color when it ripens and looks like a pear or apple. A thin skin protects the soft yellow and grainy pulp. The fruit is yellow and aromatic, about 3.5 to 4.5 inches long (9–11 cm) and will attract deer. The fruit needs to be cut from the tree with a sharp knife and harvested when mature but not ripe. The fruit is bitter and acidic, but when cooked develops a sweet taste specially when poached. It is used to impart rare aromas, desired bitter flavor and astringency to fermented or hard cider. It is high in pectin after it turns a golden yellow color and is used in jelly, tarts and pies.



Common quince fruit

Common Quince can grow from 16 to 26 feet tall and lives for more than 50 years. It likes full sun and grows in a wide variety of climates and soils. A shallow root system makes it susceptible to drought, so it needs to be watered regularly. It tolerates wet soils and drought better than other fruit trees and benefits from deep watering during the summer months. Plant it in a sheltered area since it can be damaged by strong winds. It is hardy in cold weather in Zones 5 to 9.

Problems with Common Quince include fire blight, brown rot and leaf blight. Fertilizing with lots of nitrogen makes it susceptible to bacterium. Many of these trees have the same pest problems as apple and pear trees. Prune out suckers in the winter or early

spring and prune the trees in the winter to remove fruiting wood and encourage new growth.

Common Quince Cultivars

The Common Quince cultivar 'Jumbo' has white-fleshed fruit, whereas 'Orange' has more round, orange-yellow flesh. 'Pineapple' has white flesh with a pineapple flavor, and 'Smyrna' has pink flowers and fruit with a waxy and yellow skin.

Quince makes a beautiful, edible addition to your garden. Happy gardening!

Resources

- [Quince](#), Plant Village, Pennsylvania State University
- [Flowering Quince and Cultivars](#), North Carolina Cooperative Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox
- [Common Quince, Cydonia versus Flowering Quince, Chaenomeles](#), Division of Plant Sciences, University of Missouri Integrated Pest Management
- [Flowering Quince \(Chaenomeles speciosa\)](#), Alex X. Niemiera, Virginia Cooperative Extension