



## Cotoneaster Care Sheet

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Brought to you by  
S & S Bonsai of Colorado Springs, Colorado  
(Most of the included information is obtained from several  
online sources.)



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*"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if  
you were to live forever."  
—Mahatma Gandhi—*

## The Cotoneaster

(*Cotoneaster sp.*)

**General Information:** Cotoneasters are prime picks for a bonsai project. The word cotoneaster is widely mispronounced. The correct pronunciation is "Cot-o-ne-as-ter." They are a broadleaf shrub that has small leaves and some very good characteristics that make them perfect bonsai specimens. In the Rose (Rosaceae) family, they are tolerant of heavy pruning and human error. This native of China and the Himalayas has a multi-seasonal appeal. There are many varieties of cotoneasters.

The most popular species for bonsai is **cotoneaster horizontalis**, also known as Rock-spray cotoneaster. Hardy in zones 5-8, it stands up to cold better than most Cotoneasters. This species is amazing as you will see so many changes taking place within this plant. It is a great choice because it grows very quickly, produces its flowers early, has small leaves, and even bears fruits when it is still very young. This variety has been a beautiful specimen and has done very well in shows. It has beautiful colors. You will see light and dark green in the foliage, which is then followed by either white, red, or pink blooms. The foliage of cotoneaster horizontalis will change from light green to dark green as the seasons change. This is followed by bright red fruit that is an eye-pleaser for sure. This variety will keep its fruit up until late fall or early winter, but will drop its leaves if you live in colder climates.

## CARE

**Temperature:** Zone 4-7, depending on the species, with winter protection below freezing. In warmer areas, up to zone seven and eight, cotoneaster will be evergreen, where as in colder climates they will lose their foliage in the winter. Cotoneaster still require a period of cooler weather to thrive, though do not need to go below freezing. Most Cotoneasters do well in hot climates.

**Lighting:** Varies according to variety, but most need full sun to partial shade.

**Air:** Protect from strong, cold winds.

**Watering:** As necessary in summer. Never allow to completely dry out, but do not over water. Lower water in winter, just enough to keep from dehydrating. Cotoneaster do not like wet feet!

**Fertilizing:** Every two weeks with an balanced fertilizer during spring (after flowering) and summer. Use half-strength plant food. Nitrogen free in late summer and fall, tapering off to nothing in winter.

**Pruning / Training:** Cotoneaster likes to sucker, so if it is not being grown as a clump, suckers must be vigilantly removed to promote trunk growth. Cotoneaster tolerate very heavy pruning. Prune back to old stems, as cotoneaster will back bud to old wood. Trim back to one or two leaves in late spring from new growth, cutting just above a leaf node. Cotoneaster have herringbone patterned branches, as new branches emerge from the base of every leaf stalk in midsummer or following spring, so rebuilding and forming branches is very predictable. Shape existing or new branches by cutting back to a leaf facing

in the direction you want the new branch to grow. Cotoneaster are vigorous growers, and constant attention to remove unwanted shoots and keeping the canopy from becoming over crowded is a must. Main trunks can tend toward the thin side, but thickening can be encouraged by cutting down suckers at the base as they grow. Also try planting these in the ground, as they are particularly slow to thicken in a pot. Wire in spring, before bud break if necessary.

**Insects / Pests:** Leaf blight and fireblight. Mites, aphids, scale, lace bugs.

**Propagation:** Seeds, softwood cuttings in summer, layering. Cuttings may be taken in June-July, and should take about six weeks to root. Air-layering may be used as well; the most optimal time is during bud-swelling in the spring. Cotoneaster may be grown from seed collected from the berries in fall, but seed grown plants are inferior to other methods. The seeds must be cold treated and sown in early spring.

**Repotting:** Every one to two years in spring, removing up to one third of the root system. Cotoneaster does not like to be bare-rooted. Well draining soil, about 50% organic, 50% grit.

**Design and Styling:** Cascade, semi-cascade, mame, clump, root-over-rock, exposed root, slanting, multi-trunked. Cotoneasters lend themselves to mame and shohin, but are harder to grow as large bonsai.

**Some species suitable for bonsai:**

**Cotoneaster adpressa (adepressus)**- Creeping Cotoneaster, a deciduous cotoneaster with pink flowers, red fruit and good red autumn color. Dark glossy leaves. Hardy to zone 4b.

**Cotoneaster adpressa praecox** - similar to the above, but has better autumn color and brighter fruits.

**Cotoneaster apiculata (apiculatus)**: cranberry cotoneaster. Creeping habit. Shiny green leaves with undulating margins, red to purplish-red color in autumn. White flowers flushed red; round red fruits. Zone 4.

**Cotoneaster congesta (congestus)**: congested cotoneaster, Pyrenees cotoneaster. Mounding habit. Dull bluish-green leaves- an evergreen shrub with white flowers and red fruit. Very small, and especially good for mame. Zone 6.

**Cotoneaster conspicuus decorus** - Small-leaved evergreen with red fruit. Its most notable feature is its fragrant white flowers, which open fully to resemble wild roses. Another advantage - birds don't seem to like the taste of this Cotoneaster's fruit.

**Cotoneaster dammeri**: Bearberry cotoneaster. Creeping evergreen to semi-evergreen shrub. Leaves dark green in summer and autumn, dull green and purple in winter. White flowers, scanty red fruit. 'Royal beauty' has more abundant, coral fruit. Zone 5. Similar to Skogholm cotoneaster.

**Cotoneaster divaricatus**: spreading cotoneaster - Native to China, this Cotoneaster grows to six feet. Upright but spreading habit. It has bright red berries pink flowers, and a fine

show of autumn color before losing its leaves. Hardy in zones 5-8, it stands up to cold better than most Cotoneasters. More disease and pest resistant.

**Cotoneaster horizontalis**: rockspray cotoneaster - A broad-leaved shrub, hardy to zone six. Dense, mounding habit. The rockspray cotoneaster has white or pink flowers and very nice autumn colors in areas where it is deciduous. Its herringbone growth pattern and wide leaves are not typical of the genus, although it is one of the most popular varieties for bonsai. Zone 5.

**Cotoneaster horizontalis 'Variegatus'**: variegated rockspray - less vigorous than the species, but has cream and green patterning on the leaves and pink fruit.

**Cotoneaster integerrima (integerrimus)**: common cotoneaster, European cotoneaster. Taller, rangy habit, up to 9 feet tall in landscape. Pinkish white flowers in late spring. Bluish-green foliage with little fall color. .

**Cotoneaster lucida: also Cotoneaster acutifolius - Peking Cotoneaster**: hedge cotoneaster. Upright habit, up to 8 feet tall in landscape. Black fruit, small dark green foliage that turns yellow to red in autumn. This is a species of cotoneaster that can be classified as a deciduous species because its losing its leaves in winter. Zone 4 to 8.

**Cotoneaster microphyllus (C.integrifolius)** - Recommended as a good candidate for indoor bonsai, this evergreen has white flowers and red fruit. Its slender, pointy leaves are glossy dark green. Little leaf cotoneaster. Dwarf shrub. Semi-evergreen to fully evergreen. Miniature shiny, dark green leaves on top, grayish fuzz below. White flowers, bright red fruit.

**Cotoneaster microphyllus 'Cochleatus'**: dwarf creeping cotoneaster - another good potential indoor bonsai.

**Cotoneaster microphyllus 'Thymifolius'**: thyme-leaf cotoneaster - This plant has the smallest leaves of any Cotoneaster. It has pink flowers, red fruits, and is hardy to zone 5.

**Cotoneaster multiflorus**: many-flowered cotoneaster - A large and showy plant, this is the Cotoneaster to choose for large size bonsai. It has large, red, conspicuous fruit and showy clusters of white flowers. It grows to ten feet, and has two-inch leaves that turn yellow in autumn before leaf fall. Hardy in zones 5-7, another good cold-weather choice.

**Cotoneaster simmonsii** - This Cotoneaster can be deciduous or evergreen, depending on conditions. It has pink flowers, red fruit, and small, leathery leaves which may turn scarlet in autumn.

**Cotoneaster 'Skogholm'** - An evergreen dwarf, with large oval fruit, coral red in color.

**Cotoneaster salicifolia** (Willow leaf cotoneaster.) Small dark green leaves, very small pink flowers, bright red berries and reddish foliage in fall. Water heavily. Soil must be well drained and may become dry between waterings. Fertilize with half strength high phosphorus (middle number) fertilizer.