

Q: One of the apple trees in my yard has lots of holes in straight lines punched into the bark. What is making the holes and will they hurt my tree?

A: Your tree is being visited by a bird called a sapsucker. Once sapsuckers have found a tree that they like, they will visit frequently, drilling holes in neat horizontal and vertical lines. The birds drink the sap, eat the insects attracted by the sweet material as well—desert and protein at the same table, and have been known to eat the cambium. Apples, birch, alders and other riparian trees seem to be favorites. These pretty birds migrate, flying through our area in the spring and again in the fall. Sapsucker damage has been known to kill trees if the tree is already under stress, and preventing the hole-drilling is problematic. You will need to wrap the trunk with a barrier fabric such as burlap, tied in place with twine during the times of year when the birds are present. Do not leave the burlap on during summer or winter months.

Q: Can I grow Kirengeshoma here?

A: These plants are members of the saxifrage family from Japan, and like so many plants from that part of the planet, they prefer growing conditions with loose, acidic, friable garden soil with a high organic content, ample moisture with good drainage and part shade. If this describes your garden, these dramatic plants will grow well. If you live in one of the hotter, inland area with alkaline soil and high clay content, the plants are unlikely to thrive.

Kirengeshoma produces long shoots that arise from thick rhizomes to a height of 2-3' with bright green leaves. The bell-shaped yellow blossoms bloom in the late summer-early fall. It is an attractive plant for woodland settings.