

Silver Maple

Acer saccharinum

Soft Maple, River Maple

Silver Maple is a medium sized tree of short bole and quickly branching crown common in the eastern United States. The sap is uncommonly reduced to make maple syrup although the sugar content is the lowest of the maple species used for this purpose. The wood is fairly hard, even textured, and generally mixed in with Red Maple, collectively known as "soft maples." Old heartwood develops a swirled pattern, the coveted "bird's eye maple." Because of its abundance and wide distribution, it is an important wildlife tree, supporting bees, birds, and mammals. Silver Maples tend to develop cavities that are used by birds, squirrels, opossums, and raccoons. Silver Maple is heavily planted as an ornamental due to its adaptability, ease of transplanting, rapid growth, and pleasing form. It is also used for vegetative rehabilitation of surface mined lands.



Identification

Leaves

Deciduous, opposite, simple, deeply 5 lobed and long pointed, dull green above, silvery white beneath, turning gold, crimson, and scarlet in autumn.



Flower/Fruit

Polygamo-dioecious; greenish or yellowish from reddish buds, early in spring maturing to wide spreading winged nutlets.



Bark/Wood

Gray and thin, becoming furrowed into long, shaggy, scaly ridges on older trunks. Wood is light colored, even textured, easily works, and brittle.



Form

Short of bole and low branching. Branches brittle and susceptible to storm damage. Shallow rooted, notorious for invading drain pipes.



Uses

Much used landscape tree. Uncommonly grown for timber (requires high maintenance). Rehabilitation tree for surface mined sites.

Ethnobotany

Early settlers used the sap to create a cough syrup and treatments for the liver and kidneys.

Native Distribution

New Brunswick and central Maine west to northern Michigan south to the Gulf States.

Establishment

Pruning is required to develop good form and broken branches are common.

Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 120'Hx80'Wx5'dbh
 USDA Zone 3-9
 Light Requirements Part to Full Sun

Soils Diverse
 Drought Tolerant? Moderate
 Inundation Tolerant? Yes

Pests/Damaging Agents

Many foliar diseases attack Silver Maple, though usually not fatally. Root and trunk rot is common. Susceptible to fire damage.

Similar Species

Red Maple
 Silver Maple sinuses U shaped and more than halfway to midrib; Red Maple V shaped and less than halfway. Silver Maple crushed twigs have rank odor, Red Maple do not.

Propagation

Seeds - no pre-germination treatment necessary. Roots easily from cuttings and by layering.

Source(s)

Seed from Orion Farms, NY.