

Red Maple brings a colorful accent and shade to your landscape.

If you're looking for a nice tree to accent your landscape, you might think about Red Maple. It's a good choice for urban areas where there is enough room for its large root system. This tree will withstand harsh urban conditions, including tolerance of both dry and wet soils, and a higher tolerance of pollution than many other trees. Not only is the Red Maple an attractive addition to any yard, it has the ability to attract many species of wildlife.

Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) is also known as Swamp or Soft Maple and it is one of the most common and widespread deciduous trees of eastern North America. The tree can grow quite tall and may reach heights of 50 to 100 feet. The trunk diameter can grow to 30 inches. So, if you choose to plant this tree, make sure it will have ample space to grow.

It derives its name from its brilliant scarlet autumnal foliage. Its flowers, petioles, twigs and seeds are also red to varying degrees. The bark of the tree is a pale grey and smooth when immature, but becomes darker and rougher with age. The attractiveness of the leaves along with the pleasing foliage and form makes it a popular shade tree for many landscapers.

The unique shape of the maple's leaves make it easy to identify. They are deciduous and arranged oppositely. They are about 2-4 inches long and wide with 3-5 palmate lobes and a serrated margin. The flowers are usually unisexual, with male and female flowers located in separate clusters. Flowers appear in the spring and appear reddish in color with 5 small petals. The fruit ranges from about ½ to ¾ inches long with somewhat divergent wings at an angle of 50 to 60 degrees. They vary in color from light brown to reddish. They ripen from April through June and as they reach maturity, the seeds are dispersed for a 1 to 2 week period from April through July.

More than any other forest tree in North America, the Red Maple does quite well in a variety of habitats. It can tolerate varying types of soils, textures, moisture, pH and even elevation. In nature, it is found growing in swamps, in poor dry soils and most places in between. It has been seen growing in bogs, on top of ridges and in poorly drained depressions. When growing in a forest, the maple will grow tall and branches will be located high up near the top of the tree. While in open areas, the maple will grow shorter and thicker with a more rounded crown. The ideal conditions for the Red Maple are in moderately well-drained soils where it is moist most of the year and at low or intermediate elevations.

Red Maple can live for about 150 years and reach maturity at about 70 to 80 years. One of the reasons that this tree is so prolific is that at an early age it produces roots to suit its site no matter where the seed may have fallen. For example, in wet locations, the seedlings produce short taproots with long and developed lateral roots. In dry locations, they develop long taproots with shorter laterals. Maple tree roots are primarily horizontal in the first 10 inches of the ground. Adult trees can have roots that reach 80 feet. In severe dry conditions, these trees will literally stop growing and then produce a second growth flush when conditions improve. Because of their adaptability and unique root system, maples have been known to survive in extreme flooding and drought conditions.

Although the maple is a great choice for landscaping, if horses are present on the land, it may not be the right tree for you. The leaves of Red Maple are toxic to horses. It damages red blood cells, which in turn inhibits the transport of oxygen. Symptoms will occur within 1 to 2 days after ingestion and can include depression, lethargy, increased rate and depth of breathing, increased heart rate, jaundice, dark brown urine, coma and death.

If you choose a Red Maple for your yard, make sure that there is plenty of room for not only the tree, but the massive root system. If no horses are present and you have the room, chances are good that this is the right tree for you. It will attract squirrels that will eat the buds, as well as several other types of wildlife. White-tailed deer enjoy the growth of the Red Maple as a winter food source. Lepidoptera butterflies and moths use the leaves as food. It provides nutrition for many species of wildlife in the spring when other foods may not be available.

The tree is a fast grower, can reproduce by seed and sprouts and adds beautiful color to a landscape. All in all, it's a good choice for you if you're looking for a shade producer and a plant that will attract more critters. Red Maple trees are just one of the many native plants that will be available at the Air Potato Exchange Day on January 9th at the Agriculture Center. Just bring in a bag of air potato bulbs and you'll get a free native plant. To find out more about the program either attend the next workshop on November 20th at the Sebring Civic Center from 1p.m. – 3 p.m. or give us a call at (863) 402-6545.