

Introduction:

Sugar maple, with its beautiful form and brilliant, multicolored display of fall color, is a popular shade tree in eastern North America. It is known for its quality wood and abundant sugar. Its form and bark make this an attractive tree in the winter as well. A stylized sugar maple leaf, which is Canada's national symbol, truly reflects its value.

Culture:

Sugar maple makes a great lawn or park tree, where it has sufficient room to spread. It favors well-drained, moist, fertile soil. It is sensitive to heat stress, drought, road salt, compacted soils and restricted root zones. Verticillium wilt, leaf scorch and girdling roots are potential problems. This tree needs large amounts of water. Maples do not grow well as grafted trees.



Selected cultivars:

There are many cultivars of sugar maple. Popular cultivars include:

‘Bonfire’ - Has a round crown and broad, shiny leaves. It is fairly tolerant of heat and has good yellow-orange fall color.

‘Commemoration’ - Has dense, dark green foliage that turns yellow-orange-red in fall 10-14 days earlier than the species.

Green Mountain® - Popular drought-tolerant cultivar that has dark, leathery foliage. It is thought to be a hybrid of *A. saccharum* and *A. saccharum* subsp. *nigrum*.

‘Legacy’ - Has attractive, thick, glossy foliage, but is susceptible to Verticillium wilt.

‘Newton Sentry’ - The most common of the upright sugar maple cultivars. It is a relatively slow-growing tree that was once called *A. saccharum* ‘Columnare.’ It is similar to ‘Sentry.’

‘Sentry’ or ‘Temple’s Upright’ - A narrow, upright form often confused with ‘Newton Sentry.’ It was once called *A. saccharum* ‘Monumentale.’

‘Sweet Shadow’ - Medium green leaves with deep “cut leaf” lobes. Appears to be very winter hardy.

Botanical Characteristics:

Native habitat - Eastern Canada south to Georgia, west to Texas.

Growth habit - A large tree with a rounded, dense crown.

Tree size - This slow-growing, long-lived tree reaches a height of 60 to 75 feet in cultivation; it may reach 120 feet in the wild. Spread tends to be about two-thirds the height.

Flower and fruit - Clusters of small, yellow-green flowers bloom in April. The fruit is a 1- to 1 3/4-inch samara released in the fall.

Leaf - Medium to dark green (pale underneath) and 3 to 6 inches long and wide; usually has five lobes. Fall color is striking and multicolored - red, orange and gold.

Hardiness - Winter hardy to USDA Zone 4.

Additional information:

Sugar maple is best known for its outstanding fall color that is so characteristic of New England states. Leaf colors range from bright yellows to orange and red. Sugar maple has a heavy, light brown, close-grained wood. It is called "hard maple" in the lumber industry and is a popular wood for furniture. Of particular value is maple wood with abnormal grain patterns called "curly maple" and "bird's eye maple." These types of maple have been used to make gun stocks and violins. The strength of this wood is reflected in the genus name, *Acer* (Latin for sharp), referring to ancient Rome's use of maple to make handles for spears; *saccharum* is the Latin word for sugar and refers to the high sugar content in this species' sap.

Sugar maple is also valued for the production of maple syrup. Sap collected from the trees in late winter is boiled to produce a thick syrup. Sugar maple sap contains 2 to 6 percent sugar.

Maple sugar was the only sweetener used by Native Americans of the Northeast, and they used it to make a sauce for many of their foods. When colonists settled in the Northeast, Native Americans bartered with their "bark sugar," maple sugar stored in bark boxes. They taught French and English colonists to collect maple sap.

Maple sugar has been used to flavor tobacco.