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How to Grow a Maple Tree



A large maple tree with vibrant autumn colors is in Marlboro, New Jersey.

Photo Credit: Andrew F. Kazmierski

Botanical Name: *Acer* spp.

Plant Type: [Tree](#)

Sun Exposure: [Part Sun](#), [Shade](#)

Soil pH: [Varies](#)

FREE GUIDE!



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Planting, Growing, and Pruning Maple Trees

By [Andy Wilcox](#)
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Are you a tree lover? Let’s take a moment to consider the maple tree, one of America’s favorites. This gorgeous tree provides picturesque fall color and year-round appeal. Plus, there are varieties of all sizes, from shrubs to giant trees. Learn how to plant, grow, and care for maple trees.

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About Maples

Maples belong to the genus *Acer*, and there are quite a few of them. From our favorite syrup source, the sugar maple (*Acer saccha-*

ornamental hybrids like the popular 'Autumn Blaze' red maple (*Acer x freemanii* 'Jeffersred'), there is undoubtedly one for you.

Maples are categorized as hard or soft, which can be confusing. Typically, all deciduous forest trees are referred to as hardwoods (their wood is generally harder than the soft wood of conifers). However, the faster-growing maples, including silver, bigleaf, and red maple, as well as boxelder, have softer wood that is more prone to breaking in storms and less resistant to rot.

Sugar maples, along with black and Florida maples, are referred to as hard maples. What about rock maple? That's a sugar maple by a different name.

While sugar maples are the blue-ribbon shade tree for your yard, they are slow growing, at about one foot per year after the seedling stage. Long-lived and robust, they will provide stately shade for decades. The soft maples grow rapidly and are ideal for wetter sites, reclaiming abandoned fields, planting near streambanks for stabilization, or creating quick shade or privacy. And, they're lovely wildlife habitat trees.

Of course, if you're thinking of pancakes and waffles, the sugar maple is where it's at. While other maples can also be tapped, their sap has a lower sugar content, requiring more gallons of sap to boil down when making syrup.



Sugar maples lining the driveway. Credit: Bonnie Watton

Read Next

[Maple Trees: Planting, Growing, and Pruning Maples](#)

- [How to Grow Holly Bushes](#)

PLANTING

When to Plant Maples

Shade trees like maples are either purchased bare root or in containers. Bare root trees should be planted as soon as possible after receiving them and do best when planted while the tree is still dormant in spring.

Containerized maples may be planted at any time throughout the spring and summer. While spring planting is better, it's okay to plant that late-season bargain maple in mid-summer. It'll just need more attention to watering.

Where to Plant Maples

As a group, maples prefer rich, loamy soil and moderate moisture. They will tolerate drier conditions and stony sites but will grow slower.

Select a site with:

a good choice.

- Adequate drainage. Maples like moist sites but won't do well in areas with frequent standing water.
- Slightly acidic soil. Maples are not picky about pH, although slightly acidic conditions are better.

For wetter sites, choose silver or red maple. Sites resembling wooded uplands (typical yards with adequate drainage) will be fine for hard or soft maple species.

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Most maples have shallow root systems and are heavy feeders, meaning that grass may

Some maples, like silver maple, have a reputation as sidewalk heavers.

While an excellent and extremely fast-growing shade tree, silver maples frequently shed branches in storms. Avoid planting them near driveways or your swimming pool.

How to Plant a Maple Tree

Planting maples the same way you'd plant other nursery stock.

1. Remove all sod from the spot.
2. Dig a hole the same depth as the root ball and at least twice as wide. The hole should resemble a shallow bowl, not a tuna fish can. Keep the excavated soil handy.
3. Loosen the soil around the edges and bottom of the hole. Hard compacted soil will make it difficult for new roots to penetrate (or water to drain).
4. Remove the maple tree from its container and prune any circling or girdling roots. Rootbound plants benefit from

growth outwardly.

5. Test fit the maple in the hole. Check for depth and ensure no roots are bent over or circling the hole. Enlarge the hole if necessary.
6. Backfill the hole with the native soil you removed, keeping the tree vertical while filling. Stop when the hole is about half-way refilled and tamp the soil firmly around the roots to remove air pockets, then give it a good drink of water. Continue filling the soil around the roots and firming it with your hands.
7. Mulch around the tree, about 3-4 inches thick. Spread the mulch evenly in a circle extending 2 feet from the trunk. Don't let the mulch touch the tree—keep a finger width or two of space. The final mulch job should look like a saucer, not a pyramid.

GROWING

How to Grow Maples

Get the full story on how to grow maples, including tips on soil, water, and pruning.

Deer love to nibble maple twigs, so a fence around the tree may be helpful until it's taller than they can reach.

Fertilization of maples is unnecessary. Satisfying the tree's sun, soil preference, and moisture needs is more important for growing healthy maples than fertilizer.

How to Prune Maples

Pruning maples is only necessary to remove dead and broken branches or to shape the tree for aesthetics. While maples can be pruned at any time of year, you may wish to avoid pruning in late winter and early spring, when the sap is running, to avoid a sticky mess.

For all tree-sized maple species, but especially for soft maples, remove any branches growing at right angles to the trunk early while they're still small. These branches are likely to break later on and cause a larger wound.

How to Propagate Maples

The genus *Acer* is widely varied, and while all

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Soft maples

- Seeds are ripe in spring and are not dormant—they will germinate as soon as they are planted. Plant them in moist potting mix about half an inch deep.
- Root nine-inch softwood cuttings from young trees using 1000 ppm IBA powder and 500 ppm NAA solution (buy online) and stick them in a peat-perlite mix with a mist or humidity dome. Keep the cuttings out of direct sunlight until they are rooted.

Hard maples

- Rooting from cuttings is difficult.

Experiment and keep notes.

- Choose terminal softwood cuttings from younger trees in early summer. Take 6-8 inch cuttings with the terminal bud and at two more nodes.
- Try without hormone dip as well as with various strengths—no consistent response has been documented. Any well-draining media mix will be fine.



Maple tree is the crowning glory in a home yard. Credit: tab62

Types

- Any sugar maple tree (*A. saccharum*) will be a delight in the yard. While slow to establish, they will provide beautiful fall color even as juveniles. When grown in the open, they will develop a round, lollipop shape like the trees you drew as a kid. They're generally hardy in USDA zones 3-

- 'Autumn Blaze' red maple (*A. rubrum*) is a popular, fast-growing yard tree that turns deep orange and red in the fall. It is hardy in zones 3-8. Red maples are often some of the earliest trees to show color in autumn.

GARDENING PRODUCTS



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WIT AND WISDOM

- Maple trees flower in spring! They bloom in red, yellow, green, and orange colors and are pollinated by insects.
- Some maple species can live over 300 years in the right conditions.
- Wood from maples carries sound well and is used to make musical instruments, including violins, cellos, and bassoons.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Wilcox



Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer and master gardener with a passion for soil health, small producers, forestry, and horticulture. [Read More from Andy Wilcox](#)

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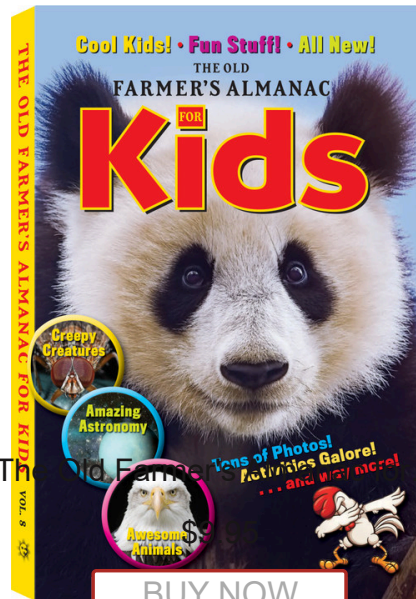
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