

Red Maple (Swamp maple, Soft Maple)

Acer Rubrum L.

Red maple has one of the largest ranges amongst the maples. Its range covers most of eastern North America. Due to its dense crown (denser than sugar maple) it makes an excellent shade tree in ones yard or street. Year round the red maple brings some color to the landscape with its various red components. The twigs, buds, flowers, immature fruits, leaf stalks, and autumn leaves are usually bright red. It has been reported by Donald Culross Peattie that even from the air we can see red maple year round due to its color and abundance.

Leaves

The leaves when they first emerge from the bud are red but quickly turn green as they grow. The crimson red maple is often mistaken for red maple because of its colors when in actuality the red maple has green leaves in the late spring and summer and only then during the dehiscence process does it turn to its brilliant red. Only second in splendor to the sugar maple. The leaves can be described as 5-15 cm long, about as wide; 3-5 lobes with sharp irregular teeth; central lobe with its 2 sides almost parallel to the midvein, separated from lateral lobes by wide, shallow, angular notches; upper surface light green, whitened beneath; bright red in autumn. Stalk 5 – 10 cm long.

Buds

One of the noticeable features of red maple in winter is the coloring of its buds almost a crimson red. Terminal bud 3 - 4 mm long, blunt, almost twice as long as wide, shiny, reddish, smooth, usually with 4 pairs of scales. Flower buds stout; become larger during the winter.



a. Fruit. b. Leaf. c. Clustered flower buds on dwarf shoots. d. Lateral bud and leaf scar. e. Winter twig.

Twigs

The twigs are noticeably shiny red to grayish-brown, hairless. Dwarf shoots occur on most branchlets, often bearing clusters of flower buds; flower buds also occur side by side at some leaf scars.

Flowers

Flowers are sometimes yellow but are more often brilliant red, with 5 very small petals and sepals, in tassel clusters, on slender stalks. Pollen flowers usually on different branches of the same tree. Young trees may bear only one type of flower. Appear in late winter, long before the leaves; one of the first maple species to flower in the spring.

Fruits

The fruits are encased in wings 12-25 mm long, angle between them about 60° . Seedcase swollen. The keys or samaras mature and are shed individually in early summer. Often children play with them as helicopter wings.