



# BWSR Featured Plant

**Name:** Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)

**Plant Family:** Aceraceae



*Red maple, fall color*

*Acer rubrum* is hard to miss in the fall landscape with its bright red fall color. Blooming from April to May and growing up to 90 feet tall, this native tree provides habitat in moist forests for cavity nesters like wood ducks, woodpeckers, and chickadees and is an important early season source of pollen and nectar for pollinators. The species also plays an important role in stabilizing soils along rivers and streams.

Statewide Wetland  
Indicator Status:

- FAC



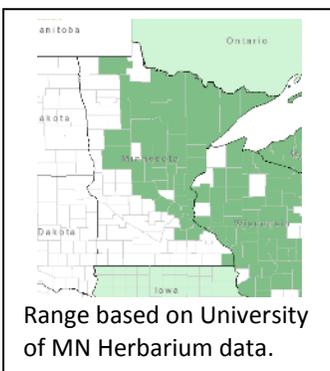
*Red female flowers above and newly developing seeds below*



## Identification

Gray bark, rounded buds and simple, opposite leaves aid in the identification of red maple. It tends to have a relatively open growth form with main branches that are closer to the ground than many other tree species. Its leaves are around four inches long, palmate, with three shallow lobes and five main veins radiating from the base. Its red or yellowish flowers bloom early in the spring before the leaves develop. When it matures in early summer, the red, yellow or reddish-brown samaras are distributed by wind and root easily by a large taproot, followed by smaller lateral roots.

## Range



In the Eastern Deciduous Forest, red maple is one of the most successful species due to aggressive seeding and an ability to tolerate a wide variety of site conditions. Red maple prefers wet sites such as floodplains, river valleys, swamps, forested bogs, and wooded bluffs. However, the species is widespread throughout Minnesota and North America, from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia south to Texas and east to Florida. With fire suppression, red maple has become more common in upland woodlands.

## Uses

With attractive leaves, flowers, and contrasting silver bark, the red maple contributes color to the landscape over many seasons. Its preference for moist soils and ability to establish quickly, makes red maple valuable as a riparian buffer species. While the leaves are reportedly toxic for cattle and horses, it is a strong spring food source for pollinators, deer, and rabbits.

The sap can be used for syrup, and the wood is excellent for fuel, furniture, and saw timber. Native Americans used the bark for a wide range of purposes including muscular aches, a remedy for hives, and tea for treating coughs. Pioneers made ink from the tannins in bark extract.

### Primary Uses:

- Erosion control
- Ornamental
- Pollinator & Wildlife resource

## Planting Recommendations

A very adaptable species, red maple can be planted by seed, containerized plants, or by transplanting into moist soil conditions. It is a prolific seed producer and can have 95%

seed germination within 10 days. Seedlings have the ability to establish in shady locations and will survive under a forest canopy for many years. When spreading seed, it is recommended to lightly cover the seed to prevent it from being eaten by wildlife. As transplants, the red maple will easily root. It is also widely available in commercial nurseries in containers. While robust in natural settings, the red maple is considered a “soft maple” and is relatively weak and prone to breaking in larger storms so it is not commonly used as a street tree.

### Planting Methods

- Seed
- Bare Root Plants
- Containerized Plants
- Transplants



Red maple leaf

## Similar Species



Silver Maple



Freeman Maple

Red Maple



Sugar Maple

Silver maple leaves are more lobed than red maple, but both species develop early in spring before other maples. Freeman is a natural (and cultivated) hybrid of the silver and red maple, but has a deeper wedge-shaped sinus unlike the squarish central leaf lobe of the red maple. The sugar maple lobes are smooth to the point, while red maples have finely toothed edges.

## References

Minnesota Wildflowers: <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/tree/red-maple>

Illinois Wildflowers: [http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/trees/plants/red\\_maple.html](http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/trees/plants/red_maple.html)

Eloise Butler: [http://www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org/pages/plants/maple\\_red.html](http://www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org/pages/plants/maple_red.html)