

RED MAPLE

Acer rubrum L.

plant symbol = ACRU

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Alternative Names

swamp maple

Uses

Erosion control: Red maple is available in quantity for revegetation work and landscaping. It is a valuable riparian buffer plant due mostly to its tolerance of wetter soils.

Wildlife: Red maple seeds provide food for squirrels and some birds. The species is not preferred by deer as a browse source, so in heavy deer pressure this species is over abundant in forest regeneration.

Wood: The wood is not desirable for lumber or veneer.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Weediness

This plant may become weedy or invasive in some regions or habitats and may displace desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Please consult

with your local NRCS Field Office, Cooperative Extension Service office, or state natural resource or agriculture department regarding its status and use. Weed information is also available from the PLANTS Web site at plants.usda.gov.

Description

Acer rubrum L., red maple, is a wide-ranging native tree that is very well adapted to most soil and site conditions. This species is one of the early harbingers of fall as it turns color well in advance of other eastern deciduous trees, especially when it is located in wet sites. The fiery colors of fall are typically a brilliant red. Conversely, it is also one of the earliest flowering trees in the spring. Red maple has the smallest winged seeds (samaras) of all native maples, about 5/8-3/4 inches long. Also, the samaras ripen in the spring- a trait shared only with silver maple which has much larger samaras. This maple is a medium sized tree with fairly rapid growth (2-5 ft/yr), but not as fast as the much larger growing silver maple.

Adaptation and Distribution

Red maple is adapted to wet sites where it associates with black ash, cottonwood, and black gum. Some forested wetlands are referred to as maple swamps due to their stands of red maple. However, red maple is also well adapted to well drained but moist soils of upland sites where its companions are sugar maple, beech, black cherry and the birches. This capability makes this species a common tree in home landscapes where the fall colors can be displayed. The range of red maple extends from Florida to the Maritimes and west to Texas and Minnesota. Red maple is shade tolerant.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

Red maple seed is easily germinated in nature or in nurseries. The seed can be direct planted with no pre-treatment. The seedlings have moderately fast growth and are usually outplanted as 1 year old or 2 year old bareroot stock.

Management

Red maple seedlings must be protected from fire and livestock, and are greatly aided where weed and grass competition is controlled. This is particularly true in any plantings where grass sod is the cover between trees. Weed control mulch or fabric, or herbicide

treatments are recommended for the first three years or longer.

Pests and Potential Problems

Few pests seriously bother red maple, although the Asian longhorned beetle is a dire threat to the species if eradication efforts fail.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

There are many selections in the horticultural trade that have mostly been selected for a growth form oddity. These are not recommended for riparian buffer use, rather the typical growth form is preferred. Purchasing stock of known origin will aid in assuring adaptation, and nurseries should be willing to provide this information.

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS <<http://plants.usda.gov>> and Plant Materials Program Web sites <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>.

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