



"Red Maple, *Acer Rubrum* – NH Big Tree for April"

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Native red maple trees burst into flower in April, gloriously announcing the arrival of spring with their fluffy red blossoms high in the treetops.

Red maple, sometimes called swamp maple, is the most common hardwood tree in New Hampshire, and one of the most colorful. Not only does its brilliant red fall color contribute to New Hampshire's fabulous autumn color spectacular, its blossoms tinge the spring woods with a reddish glow of early color.

Both male and female flowers are found on different tree branches of the same tree; the red flowers are the female flowers while the male flowers are red-yellow.

Red maple is easy to identify from its many red parts; red flowers, buds and twigs, reddish stems on the leaves, and of course the brilliant red fall color. Opposite branching is another clue for identifying all maples; look for twigs exactly opposite one another along the branches.

To distinguish a red maple leaf from sugar maple leaves, look for a sharp 'V' between the three lobes of the leaf. Sugar maples have a curved 'u' shape between the lobes of its broader leaf.

Jon Nute, Hillsborough County UNH Cooperative Extension Educator, Forest Resources, notes that only white pine is more common than red maple in New Hampshire, and red maple is increasing.

Three reasons for its survival success are prolific seed production with seeds that sprout in either sun or shade, its ability to sprout from stumps, and its ability to sprout from roots. Because it sprouts so readily from stumps it is often seen growing in clumps in hedgerows or long stonewalls, or as a multiple stemmed tree. Red maple grows just about everywhere because it tolerates both compacted, poor and thin soils of mountainsides as well as saturated, soggy soils of swamps and low areas.

It produces sap in the spring but only a third as strong as sap from sugar maple trees. It isn't prized for its wood, probably another reason it's so common. The heartwood in the very center of the trunk is dark. Boards cut from red maples aren't evenly colored but streaked, and

not desirable for cabinetry or furniture. Instead, it is used for pulp, and pallets, framing in upholstered furniture, fuel and canoe paddles.

The biggest New Hampshire red maple is 71 feet tall and has a trunk 216 inches around, but it's in poor condition. The runner-up according the NH Big Tree records is 99 feet tall and 131 inches around and in good shape.

If you know of a super sized red maple larger than these two, go to the Big Tree website to learn how to nominate it for measuring. The NH Big Tree program cooperates with the National Register of Big Trees through American Forests. For more information and to see the list go to: <http://extension.unh.edu/Forestry/FORCTS.htm>

Don't confuse our native red maple, *Acer rubrum*, with the Norway maple cultivar 'Crimson King,' often referred to as red maple too. 'Crimson King' has dark maroon leaves that turn practically black in the fall. These leaves are broad like Norway maples, and create very dense shade. All Norway maples including 'Crimson King' are now on the state's Invasive Species list and after this year, won't be sold in the state.

They naturalize in woodlands where they out-compete native species, including New Hampshire's signature tree, the red maple.

Also visit the NH Big Tree web site at: www.nhbigtrees.org for the complete list champion Big Trees. The UNH Cooperative Extension and the NH Division of Forests and Lands sponsor the NH Big Tree program in cooperation with the National Register of Big Trees through American Forests.

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