

Aceraceae

maple family

Our beloved national symbol is one of 110 species found on all continents. Divided between two genera; the other is limited to China.

Acer L.

maple

All species are woody, trees or shrubs. Our native species have simple, opposite leaves. Flowers are regular and hypogynous, and are almost completely or functionally unisexual. Sepals and petals are five-merous. Typically eight stamens are inserted into the nectary disk, if present. The ovary has two locules, compressed at right angles to the septum. Fruits are double samaras, the single-seeded winged portion soon dropping away from the persistent central axis.

Key to species

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| A. Leaves compound. | <i>Acer negundo</i> |
| aa. Leaves simple, toothed, lobed. | B |
| B. Leaf sinuses between the main lobes rounded. | C |
| C. Sap milky; petals present; samara wings widely divergent. | <i>A. platanoides</i> |
| cc. Sap watery; petals absent; samara wings not widely divergent. | D |
| D. Ovary and fruit pubescent; nectary disk absent; winter buds red; bark with curling flat plates | <i>A. saccharinum</i> |
| dd. Ovary and fruit not pubescent; nectary glands present; winter buds brown; bark on mature trees furrowed. | <i>A. saccharum</i> |
| bb. Leaf sinuses between the main lobes pointed, forming a sharp angle. | E |
| E. Flowers before leaves unfold; flowers lateral in leafless umbels. | <i>A. rubrum</i> |
| ee. Flowers after leaf-out; flowers terminal. | F |
| F. Leaves coarsely and simply serrate; inflorescence erect. | <i>A. spicatum</i> |
| ff. Leaves finely double-serrate; inflorescence drooping. | <i>A. pensylvanicum</i> |

Acer negundo* L.*Box-elder; Manitoba Maple; érable à Giguère***Photo by Ross Hall*

A tree reaching 20m in height, its young twigs are glaucous. Leaves are pinnate, with 3–9 lanceolate and coarsely toothed leaflets. Flowers without petals appear earlier than or with the leaves. Staminate flowers droop in umbellike clusters; pistillate flowers arranged in drooping racemes. Copious seeds are produced by this somewhat invasive ornamental.

*Photo by David Mazerolle*

Favoured as an ornamental and escaping in moist shady soils; a weedy tree.

Established at Victoria Park, Truro, Windsor, Antigonish, Tatamagouche, Bridgewater and in the Annapolis Valley.

Introduced from further west.

Acer pensylvanicum* L.*Moosewood; Striped Maple; érable bois-barré***Photo by Sean Blaney*

A slender tree, it has beautifully striate bark in shades of green, gray and pink. Leaves have three shallow lobes, each acuminate and doubly-serrate. They appear extremely large, especially on young trees. Drooping racemes bear fewer flowers than those of Mountain Maple, found in similar habitats. Each is either staminate or pistillate; flowers are yellow.

Prefers shade in rocky woods, deciduous forests, on slopes and streamsides.

Widespread but not abundant.

NS to ON, south to MN, TN and GA.



Photo by Sean Blaney

***Acer platanoides* L.**

Norway Maple; érable de Norvège



Photo by Ross Hall

Trees have milky sap, best seen at the base of a detached petiole. Its leaves tend to be dark green above and lighter below. Each has 5–7 lobes and a few pointed teeth. Yellow-green flowers are arranged in rounded corymbs. Mature fruit have widely divergent wings.

Flowers in May.

Frequently planted in urban areas and quickly spreading to successional forests. Potentially invasive.

Throughout the province.

Introduced from Europe and established from NS to ON, south to TN and NC; west coast.

***Acer rubrum* L.**

Red Maple; érable rouge



Photo by Sean Blaney

It can reach 35m at maturity, under ideal growing conditions, although we generally see it as a shrub in poorly-drained soils or on disturbed sites. Leaves tend to be thick and of a leathery texture, with 3–5 lobes, serrate on their margins. When young they are densely pubescent below. Tight clusters of red flowers arise from lateral buds, opening before the leaves. Young twigs are also red. Samaras are

small, with the sides of the wings nearly parallel.

Var. *trilobum* Torr. & Gray ex K. Koch resembles the typical variety as described here but with three lobes. It occurs from southwestern NS to Mabou.

Flowers late April-May.

Part of mature, swampy forests but now widespread in cut over areas due to its ability to stump sprout. Also found on alluvial soils.

Common.

NF to ON, south to TX and FL.

***Acer saccharinum* L.**
Silver Maple



Photo by David Mazerolle

Relatively fast-growing for a maple, it can reach 25m in height. Striking in its leaves, on long slender petioles with downy silver lower surfaces, flashing silver in the breeze. Usually a dull yellow in fall, it often loses its leaves earlier than other maples. Grey bark tends to be shaggy at maturity. The samaras measure 3–5cm long.

Generally found near flowing water and in wetlands.

In Nova Scotia, it has been found along the Cornwallis River, Kings Co. A preliminary genetic evaluation of the individuals at this location suggest that this is a naturalized population. The results of this study however are not believed to be conclusive (pers.comm. M. Lemieux).

Ranges from NB west to MN, south to TX and FL. Absent along the coastal plain, appearing to be Alleghenian in its affinity.

Acer saccharum* Marsh.*Sugar Maple; érable à sucre; snawei***Photo by Ruth Newell*

A dominant feature of the Appalachian deciduous forest, trees may reach 40m. Flowers are borne in an umbel, arising from the distal bud and carried on long drooping pedicels. Wings of the samaras are incurved, forming a horseshoe shape. Bark is smooth and grey.

Flowers from late April to early June.

Found on well-drained soils.

Found throughout but most common on the slopes of the Cobequid Mountains, east to central Cape Breton. Absent from the Cape Breton Highlands, which are more boreal.

Ranges from NS to ON, south to GA and AL.

Our Canadian flag bears a stylized impression of a maple leaf. The Canadian 20 dollar bill has a maple leaf on it that more resembles the weedy Norway Maple than our iconic species.

Acer spicatum* Lam.*Mountain Maple; érable bâtard; malsnawei***Photo by Sean Blaney*

A large freely branching shrub, it may also grow as a small tree, to 10m. Leaves have either three serrate lobes or three lobes with two smaller lobes, all serrate. Greenish flowers are arranged in an erect raceme, 3–8cm long.

Flowers in June.

Characteristic of mountainous slopes, ravines, streamsides



Photo by Martin Thomas

in dense thickets and in forest openings.

Common throughout, especially along the hilly northern areas.

NF to SK, south to TN and GA.