

Leaves, Limbs, Needles & Boughs

by Fred Opperman



Tree trivia question: What tree/wood is the favorite for butcher's blocks and the side board of trucks? Answer at end of article.,

This month's selection comes from one of the largest families of trees and is the state tree of Rhode Island: *Acer rubrum* — (a'ser ru brum) — Red Maple, Swamp Maple or Scarlet Maple are some of its common names.

Growth form: Somewhat of a medium tree up to 70 feet tall, with a trunk diameter of up to 3 feet, with an oval crown.

Leaves: Opposite, simple; blades up to 6 inches long, nearly as broad, 3 to 5 lobed. Edges sharply toothed to nearly toothless. Emerging leaves are reddish tinged gradually changing to medium to dark green above, white or gray on lower surface. The various varieties have great fall color, ranging from the oranges to the reds.



Buds: Rounded, reddish, usually hairy, up to 1/4 inch long. Flower buds in clusters often encircling nodes, edge of scales finely pubescent.



Flowers: Staminate and pistillate borne separately, but sometimes on the same tree, in dense clusters, bright red or yellow, opening in late March or early April.

Bark: Gray and smooth when young, becoming darker and scaly and/or ridged and furrowed with age.

Wood: Heavy, close-grained, light brown, used in furniture and gun stocks.

Culture: Transplants readily and should be done so only in the spring. Prefers slightly acid soils, moist conditions; tolerant of ozone; occurs naturally in low wet areas and is often one of the first trees to color in the fall. Shows chlorosis in high pH soils due mainly to manganese deficiency.

Cultivars: There are over 30 to choose from. It is best to contact your local nursery to find the variety that is best suited for the Chicagoland area.

Trivia answer: American sycamore, because of its toughness.

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