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Trees of Ontario: the Maples

The maple is the perfect tree. From overall proportion to the smallest detail, every part fits together in perfect balance, every detail grows in duplicate. When it puts forth a bud, this is matched by a twin bud directly opposite it on the twig. Branch opposes branch, leaf opposes leaf. This plan of growth is found also in seed and leaf patterns, where angles and curves of one side mirror those of the other.

As a group the maples are identified readily by their foliage. With the exception of Manitoba maple, they have 3- or 5-lobed leaves, which are distinguished principally by their teeth and notches.

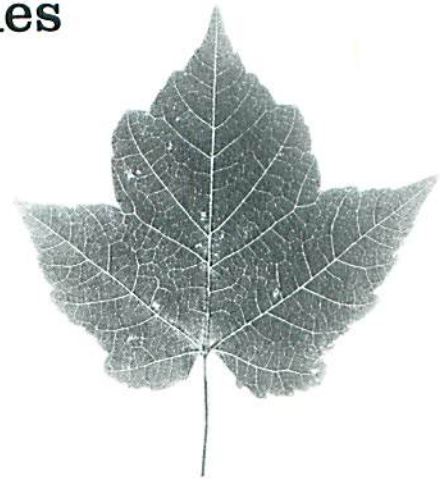
Maple is the second most important hardwood species in Canada (after birch), and is used for flooring, furniture, boats, and the interior woodwork of houses. Although there are about 150 known species of maples, only seven are commonly found in Ontario: sugar, black, red, silver, mountain, striped, and two imports, Manitoba and Norway.

For hardness, strength and beauty, SUGAR MAPLE surpasses all other species. Its autumnal foliage is the most magnificent display of color in nature, and its wood is prized by furniture builders. It is also the mainstay of the maple syrup industry. A large tree, sugar maple often reaches heights of 25-30 m. Note that its leaves have five lobes that point outward and are widespreading.

BLACK MAPLE, which is considered by some authorities to be a variety of sugar maple, is found only in southern Ontario. It has essentially the same properties and uses as sugar maple, although it prefers moister sites. It can be recognized by its flimsy, downward curving leaves, which always appear wilted.

RED MAPLE is a medium-sized tree, reaching an average of 15-20 m at maturity. Hold the tip of a growing twig in your hand and examine the buds: they are smooth and crimson, and bunched around the twig. When they start to open they ooze with sap.

The leaves of the red maple have 3 lobes that point forward, with a sharp V in the angle between the lobes. The edges have more teeth than those of sugar maple. Throughout the year, some part of the tree shows red: the buds in spring, the leaves in fall, and the twigs at all times.



Red Maple



Silver Maple



Striped Maple

Straight, fast-growing, and easy to transplant, red maple makes an excellent shade tree provided it has sufficient moisture. The unique wood grains known as birds-eye maple or curly maple, highly prized by the furniture industry, are sometimes hidden in this tree.

SILVER MAPLE grows best along lakeshores and streams. It has a short trunk and 5-lobed leaves with deep notches. Silver maple has big, conspicuous clusters of plump buds, and is one of the first trees to bloom in spring.

Though fast-growing, silver maple is brittle, and the wind tears it apart over the years. Its chief use is as an ornamental along city streets and in parks.

MOUNTAIN MAPLE is easily taken for a young red maple, but its leaves are rougher, darker and rounder. They are usually 3-lobed and sharply toothed. The bark is red-brown and the twigs are hairy.

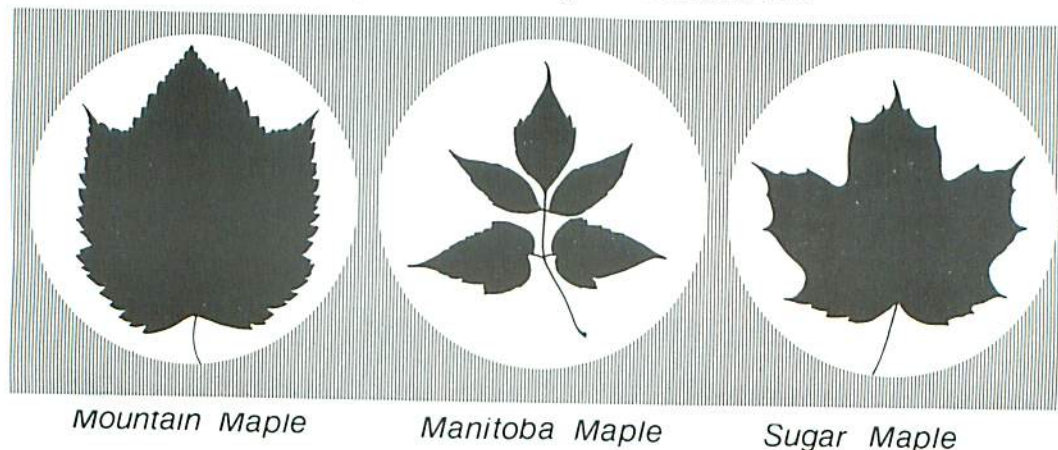
Mountain maple is a small, bushy tree--the smallest maple in eastern Canada--although it occasionally reaches heights of up to 8 m. It is often the dominant tree of the hilly underbrush where the ruffed grouse finds cover.

STRIPED MAPLE has thin, 3-lobed leaves, 12-15 cm long and nearly as broad. Like mountain maple, it is small and bushy, although, under favorable conditions, it may attain a height of 12 m. Also called moosewood, striped maple is a favorite with deer and moose, which eat its sugary bark and buds. It is a tree of the woods, mountain streams, and cool, shadowy places.

MANITOBA MAPLE differs from all the others in having a compound leaf, with 5-7 long-pointed leaflets, variously toothed, lobed or cleft. Although it is not native to Ontario, Manitoba maple can be seen on many city streets, where it is used primarily as a shade tree and for ornamental purposes.

NORWAY MAPLE, another foreigner, is easily distinguished from the native maples by its leaves, which have teeth with bristle-like tips and an undersurface that is a lustrous green. If you cut a leaf stock and squeeze it, a milky juice will ooze out, but don't drink it, it's not very palatable.

Like Manitoba maple, Norway maple is chiefly an ornamental.



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Copies of this leaflet can be obtained from the Centre's Information Office.