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AcerMania. AcerPhilia. The crazy love of one of our greatest group of trees. Maples. From maple syrup to maple furniture. From musical instruments due to their tone-carrying trait to a wondrous range of landscape plants. Here are a few queries about maples I have received recently and a few rhetorical questions I have added to the mix for proper seasoning.

Q. – Which maples are used to make maple syrup?

A. – How topical. The obvious answer is sugar maple, *Acer saccharum*, with sweetness of the sap sewn into its Latin name. Silver maple is also sometimes used, and its Latin name, *Acer saccharinum*, suggests this is so. Black maple, *Acer nigrum*, is commonly used and it is so closely-related to sugar maple that it is often considered a sub-species. Box elder, *Acer negundo*, is also used somewhat in Canada, but to me one of the most surprisingly tapped maples, increasing in popularity in Ohio is red maple, *Acer rubrum*. Its sap is less sweet but red maple sugar-bushes are easier to manage.

Q. Where does the name “Ácer” come from?

A. The origins are somewhat obscure, but one theory is that its roots mean “sharp”, which if true would relate to the pointed nature of the leaf lobes on many maples. As a Latin genus name, *Acer* has over 120 species worldwide, with only one in the southern hemisphere.

Q. – Which maples are native to the United States?

A. - Five are familiar to us here in the northeastern U.S., namely sugar maple, red maple, silver maple, striped maple and box elder. Add the Florida maple and the chalkbark maple in the southeast and from the western U.S. the vine maple, mountain maple, big-leaf maple, canyon maple, and you can see that most of those 120+ species of maples are non-native.

Q. – When do silver maples and red maples bloom?

A. – Obviously, at a different time each year, but if you go to <https://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/gdd/> you will discover that it is reliably close to when Degree Days reach 34 for first bloom and 42 for full bloom for silver maple and 44 and 75 for red maple. On Wednesday of this week the degree-days for Wooster, Ohio had reached 58, so full bloom for red maple is not quite here yet this year.

Check out this cool website at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster (use the site listed above or just Google degree-days + OARDC). It is a neat way to follow the season of flowering and insect development, both driven by heat units. And for the simple way to add the weather forecast to the picture, keep this simple predictor in mind: degree days go up when the temperature rises above 50 degrees in a day. If it gets to 56, then the equation is  $56-50/2$ , or an added three degree-days.

Q. – Do maples have attractive flowers and fruits?

A. – Indeed they do. Check out their often-irritating to gardeners but fascinating little helicopter fruits and the often un-noticed flowers, such as the chartreuse yellow flowers of sugar and Norway maples and the female pistils and male stamens of red maple.

Q. - What are your favorite maples?

A. – This question I asked of Jason Veil, the new curator of OSU's Sequest Arboretum at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster. He is a learned plantsman and will also be one of the co-teachers for the AcerMania talk at the OSU Extension Trees on Tap program at OSU-Mansfield on May 23. I asked for his five favorites.

Jason began his answer by noting, in true acermaniacal fashion, that “with over 100 species and thousands of cultivars [cultivated varieties]”, coming up with a top five was punishingly difficult. Jason continued, “As with most plants, anything on my top five list today could be usurped by a new plant that tickles my fancy tomorrow.”

Jason's Final Five: [Does not include the Michigan Wolverines].

Chalkbark Maple. (*Acer leucoderme*). Jason notes that this close relative of sugar maple (some consider it a subspecies) is excellent for small landscapes, as it grows “somewhat leisurely” and to a modest height of 25 feet, compared to sugar maple's ultimate height of 60 feet or higher. Though its native range is the Carolinas west to the gulf Coast region, it is cold hardy to -20 F. Blazing golds and oranges in fall. Jason recommends: “Chalkbark Maple is a promising heat-adapted, compact version of Sugar Maple, much more suitable to smaller landscapes and for use under utility lines.”

Striped Maple (*Acer pensylvanicum*). – The bark of striped maple gives it the common name, with younger stems “decorated with conspicuous white striations, resembling stripes.” This native maple is our lone “striped maple” with a large number of Asian “snakebark” maples possessing similar striations. We see this maple in woods in New England, in the Appalachians and in northeast Ohio in protected locations. As Jason reminds us, “Observing this tree along a rural New England roadway or high in the Blue Ridge should remind us of its preference for cool, shady locations. Proper siting will help it endure hotter, more humid summers and extend its garden lifespan in our area.” He recommends ‘Erythrocladum’ (Red Branch), an old cultivar “featuring young branches that transition from green to striking shades of orange and coral during the winter months.”

Japanese Maple (*Acer palmatum* ‘Murasaki kiyohime’). As Jason notes, there is almost an infinitude of Japanese maples. He chose ‘Murasaki kiyohime’ as “perhaps the farthest of these from most gardener's idea of a typical maple.” It is low-growing, only 3-4' tall by 6-8' wide after several years, “filling a completely different landscape niche.” He notes that 'Murasaki kiyohime', with its new foliage emerging bright golden yellow edged in crimson is a “flamboyant conversation piece, proving that the term ‘groundcover maple’ is not a horticultural oxymoron.”

Sycamore Maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus* ‘Esk Sunset’). Sycamore maple is native to central Europe and western Asia and so-named for its sycamore-like palmate leaves. In fact, in the UK they are sometimes called sycamores, though they are not to be confused with our native sycamores or American planetrees. This tree has spread throughout the world and a mutated cultivar was discovered in New Zealand in the Esk Valley. Jason notes: “This provocative maple boasts leaves mottled with shades of cream, pink, and green variegation. As a bonus, the leaf undersides are the color of a delicious red velvet cake.” It is another example of a shorter version of a much larger tree, “maturing in the range of 15-20’—a much better fit for most gardens.” Jason noted that it must be planted in shade to avoid burning of the foliage features.

Shantung or Purpleblow Maple (*Acer truncatum*) – Jason loves this Chinese native maple for its toughness, noting that it will “thrive in environmental conditions that would scare the living bark off of more fastidious trees.” Drought and cold tolerance, adaptability to poor soils, this tree “should be on the radar of urban foresters from coast to coast.” It is another small maple (25-30' at maturity). It has: “Blazing orange to scarlet fall color”, and is yet another admirable attribute of this industrial-strength maple species. Check out selections such as ‘Main Street’ and ‘Fire Dragon’.

Thanks, Jason: I learned a lot.

Q. – Is the ‘Flame’ cultivar of Amur maple a good choice for a street tree in northeast Ohio?

A. – *Acer tataricum* subsp. *ginnala* ‘Flame’ has outstanding fall color, but...these Amur maples are rapidly (very rapidly) becoming known as invasive species in the United States. So, not a good choice.

Q. – What are the environmental benefits of a 24” diameter sugar maple?

A. – Using the National Tree Benefits Calculator ([treebenefits.com](http://treebenefits.com)) a 24 inch diameter sugar maple growing in front of a house in Doylestown, Ohio will provide \$238 of environmental benefits *annually*. This handy tree benefit tool, developed by the Casey Tree Foundation of Washington D.C. and the Davey Tree Expert Company of Kent, Ohio is based on the i-tree model. I-tree was developed by the United States Forest Service and others, including its private partner, the native northeast Ohio-grown Davey Tree. For details, check it out; one click away. Once the tree reaches 29 inches in diameter, benefits increase to \$301 annually. Tree value appreciates, rather than depreciates, with age

Q. – If I find myself becoming an AcerManiac, what should I do?

Enjoy. The. Maples. Take pictures. And consider becoming a member of the Maple Society ([maplesociety.org](http://maplesociety.org)). Yes, it is perhaps a little late to rearrange your schedule to attend their spring May Madness of an event, the Maple Study Weekend at the Arboretum Wespelaar in Belgium on May 12-13.

And become one with Thomas Pakenham, who in “Meetings with Remarkable Trees”, wrote:

*I drove to Westenbirt, the arboretum in Gloucestershire, one misty morning in October, 1994. The parkland was full of parked cars. ‘Is there a pop concert or car rally?’, I asked with dismay. ‘No, they’ve come here like you – to see the maples.’*