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Under the Oaks ARBORETUM NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 25

Learn all about Red Maples and the importance of inventorying trees.

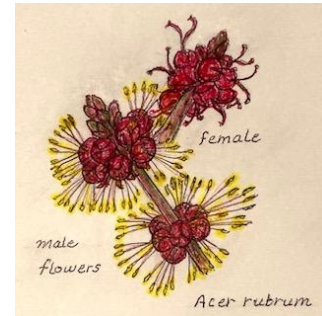


***Acer rubrum*, Red Maple**

*Article and below photo and illustration by Linnea West, MBG Tree Team
above photo by Jan Castillo, MBG Tree Team*

One of the first trees to flower in spring, Red Maple's bare twigs are aglow in February with hundreds of tiny red sunburst blossoms - a welcome sight at the end of winter!

Look closely and you might see that some of the flowers are round 'sputnik' clusters of $\frac{1}{2}$ " long red or yellow filaments topped with yellow anther sacs of pollen. These are male flowers. Note each flower's surrounding five red petals and five red sepals, shorter than the stamens.



Other clusters are female. In the center of each of these flowers are two slender bright red style-tubes arching out from the ovary. At the style tip is a stigma to catch pollen grains blown on the wind. Inside each rounded ovary are two ovules which, when pollinated, will develop into the two seeds of a paired maple samara. The stalk at the base of each female flower will elongate 2 inches to allow the flowers to dangle. This gives the look we know of ripe maple seed samaras hanging in clusters.

Male and female flowers of Red Maple are most often on separate trees. They can also be on separate branches of the *same* tree. This resourceful tree can even produce 'perfect' flowers, with both male and female parts. This is possible because each flower retains dormant attributes of the opposite sex activated only when circumstances require.

Leaves of Red Maple are opposite and simple. They have three to five lobes with the center three lobes dominant and pointing upward. The center lobe is squarish below the pointed tip with almost parallel sides. Leaf edges are finely serrated. Approximately 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ - 4 inches long and 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, the blade is smooth and dark green with a light underside and a long petiole. Fall color ranges from red to orange, yellow, and maroon, depending on the temperature and rain of any given year, the soil it is growing in, as well as the individual tree. Every year is a glorious show!*



The youngest shoots are smooth and red-brown, often showing a flush of red with the opening of flowers. Second-year twigs, as well as young and intermediate branches, are smooth silver-gray. Older branches and large trunks will become dark gray, rough, and ridged, sometimes with wide vertical plates and cracks.

Mature trees can grow to 60– 90 feet tall and 2 to 3 feet in diameter.

Red Maple is the most abundant native tree in eastern and central North America. Also known as Swamp Maple, it is most prolific in lowland and wet areas but can thrive in a wide range of soils and up hillsides. This adaptable tree provides food for wildlife – seeds for many birds including finches, juncos, nuthatches, as well as chipmunks, squirrel, and deer. It serves as larval host plant to nearly 300 butterfly and moth species. Maple trees provide homes for insects, small mammals, and birds. The tender twigs and leaves provide food for

browse. Even the sap nourishes mourning cloak, anglewing, and wood nymph butterflies.

Red Maples can be found throughout the Memphis Botanic Garden grounds including:

- on the parking lot islands south of the Visitors Center by the exit drive
- along the paved path just south of the Arborvitae Alle' to the Iris Garden
- in My Big Backyard west of Treetop Adventure

**For information on factors influencing fall color, see [Under the Oaks](#) vol. 23 in the archives [by clicking here](#).*

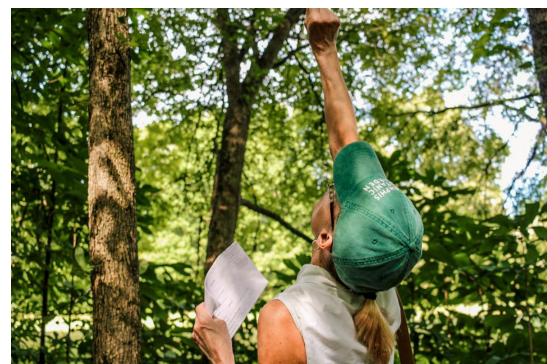


Managing Trees: The Tree Inventory

By Bo Kelley, MBG Arborist

We live in a world enamored with data. Warehouses sit full of servers and machines all devoted to the storage of information: a modern-day library. We are wired to gather and store information, and this exercise serves us well in almost any endeavor. There might be a tendency to “let nature take its course” where tree care is concerned; we believe the tree knows best, and in most cases, we are right. However, the trees in question might be far from home, surrounded by a world of our making, and we are responsible for their care and management. When managing trees in any capacity, from botanic gardens to front yards, we should strive to capitalize on the benefits of information and make more deliberate actions when intervention is necessary. This is best done built upon a foundation of data in the form of an inventory.

Development of a tree inventory begins with identification. Trees can have highly specific needs depending on the species, so before you plant a tree or begin to care for one, the species should be known and understood. As early as possible, it is beneficial to track anything that is done to the tree, either accidentally or deliberately. Has the tree lost limbs to a storm? Has it been pruned? Has it received fertilization? Are other trees of the same species in the area experiencing issues? A record of events such as these will help homeowners and professional arborists make more informed decisions for the care of a tree. At the Botanic Garden, tracking detailed information on tree history and condition leads to more sensible management strategies. Currently, we are reforming our inventory and the policies surrounding it with that in



mind. In either case, the homeowner and the horticulturist can utilize this strategy to move from a perspective of reaction to one of anticipation and understanding. In the end, nature will always have the upper hand, but our informed influence may prove beneficial for the trees under our care.

Celebrate the Official City of Memphis Arbor Day on Friday, March 5



Join us on **Friday, March 5, at 10 am** to celebrate **the official City of Memphis Arbor Day** and help Memphis City Beautiful celebrate their 90th anniversary by participating in the 'Plant the Town Red' campaign. The celebration will include a reading of the Mayor's proclamation, tree planting demonstration, tree and shrub giveaway, and a tour of the magnificent trees at MBG.

This event is free and open to the public. Masks and social distancing are required.

If you would like to stay and help remove invasive and exotic plants in our Wildflower Woodland, **[please register here for our Volunteer Weed Wrangle.](#)**

To read past issues of *Under the Oaks* visit the archive by **[clicking here.](#)**

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