

# Conservation Corner

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Fall is fast approaching. And while fall is the calm before winter storms, it's still my favorite season of the year with its clear, crisp days and harvest moonlit nights filled with vibrant color. After all, here in Iowa, it's the sumac in September and the maples in October and a good time to encounter the maple tree.

Worldwide there are 128 species of maples in the *Acer* genus. Maples are easily identified by their palmately lobed and veined leaves in opposite arrangement. You can find the distinctive leaf of the sugar maple on the Canadian flag and team uniforms of the Toronto Maple Leafs.



Maple flowers may be green, yellow, orange, or red. And while each individual flower is small and rather insignificant, an entire tree covered in blooms creates a striking display as well as an early source of pollen and nectar for bees. Maple trees also serve as the larval host plant for 265 species of butterflies.

Maple fruits or samaras, more commonly known as maple keys, helicopters, or whirlybirds, consist of a nutlet or pair of seeds encased in flat, papery tissue. As many of you know, each tree may produce thousands of samaras, each one capable of becoming a tree – or two. But did you know that during WWII, the U.S. Army patterned special air drop supply carriers that held up to 65 pounds based on the design of the maple seed?

In general, maples are fairly tolerant of adverse conditions but may be susceptible to mildew and other fungal diseases including *Verticillium* wilt and tar spot, which looks bad but usually has no long-term effects. A potential pest here in the U.S. and Canada is the Asian long-horned beetle.

Hardwood maples are valuable timber trees whose products range from bowling pins, baseball bats, archery bows and arrows, to furniture to musical instruments. Maple wood is known as a tone-wood as it carries sound well and so is used to create violins, violas, cellos, double basses, guitar sections, bassoons, and drums. Hard maples, including sugar and black maple species, are also prized for their spring syrup flow and fall color show.

Iowa is home to five native maple species – the boxelder as well as the mountain, black, sugar, and silver maple. All prefer moist, well-drained soils. Both hard and soft maples remain one of our most popular shade and windbreak trees.

PCCB is offering eight maple cultivars on the 2019 Tree & Shrub Sale: Brandywine, Crimson King, Emerald Lustre®, Matador™, Royal Red, Silver Queen, Sugar Fall Fiesta®, and Sun Valley. As crosses of various hard and soft maples, many new varieties feature moderate to fast growth rates along with great fall color. And while many people request fast-growing trees, remember that for trees fast usually equals messy and short-lived.

In closing, I encourage everyone to enjoy the maple trees in your backyard or community this fall. Better yet, order a new maple tree to plant next spring – summer shade and fall color for the next generation.