

Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)

Nebraska Forest Service

The northeastern United States is well known for fall color and perhaps the tree that stands out the most is the red maple (*Acer rubrum*). Maples in general produce some of the most striking colors in fall. But red maple lives up to its name with brilliant red colors.

Red maple does grow well in eastern Nebraska. It is a large forest tree and native across the entire eastern part of the country all the way to the Missouri river. The red maple is used to sites that are moist and grows in bottomlands and along streams and rivers. The tree will grow in what foresters call “dog hair” stands where trees are very close together and tall. It is a fast growing tree and similar in habit to silver maple.

Red maple is used for furniture, cabinets and veneer. It can also be tapped for sap, but is not as productive as sugar maple due to its lower sugar content. Red maple is considered a soft wood species and it is Rhode Island’s state tree.

While red maple is often planted in this part of the country it sometimes has problems with heavy clay sites. The tree likes soils that are more acidic and have higher organic content than most soils here. But it can be planted successfully on sites that are not terribly disturbed from construction or farming operations.



There are many varieties of red maple. The most popular is “red sunset” red maple. The “northwood” red maple is a Minnesota variety and more adapted to our geographic area. In reality the best performance may be obtained by planting pure red maple (not grafted).

Red maple has attractive ornamental features in every season. Early in spring, before leafing out, clusters of tiny red flowers with long, showy stamens cover the branches. Emerging leaves and winged seeds are red. The petioles (leaf stems) are red throughout the growing season. Fall foliage is striking and the bark, shaggy with age, is a nice winter feature. Red maple gets its name from the reddish color of the youngest twigs and the reddish buds that are visible in winter.

If you’re looking for bright red fall colors then red maple is a tree to consider.

