

## Learning about Swamp Red Maple *Acer rubrum*

Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) is also known as Swamp Maple or Soft Maple. It can grow in a wide variety of soils, ranging from wet, swampy soils to dry soils, but prefers wet soils. It can also inhabit a wide variety of pH soils, although it does not grow as well in salty soils.

**Characteristics.** Swamp red maples are medium to large trees, commonly growing 40-50 feet high and 1.5 – 2.5 feet thick. It often grows in clumps of stems sprouting from one stump, but also occurs as a single trunked tree. They are usually planted in gardens and lawns for ornamental purposes. During the fall their leaves display brilliant red coloring. The twigs of the tree are red to grayish brown in color and are hairless. Dwarf shoots are often present on the limbs.

**Fruit.** The fruit of the swamp red maple is a “samara”, which means that the seeds grow “wings” to help in seed dispersal. The seeds are 15-25 mm long and formed in pairs at angles of 50-60 degrees, maturing in late May or early June, and are red or brown in color.

**Geographic Range.** The Swamp Red Maple is one of the most commonly widespread deciduous trees of eastern North America. They range from the Minnesota/Ontario border to the south near Miami, Florida, southwest to east Texas, and east to Newfoundland. Red Maples are the most widely distributed species of tree along the east coast.

### Additional Information.

- Swamp red maple’s soft lumber is used in the furniture industry.
- Smaller swamp red maples are used to make higher quality paper.
- If planted correctly, *Acer rubrum* is a very easily grown in green houses.
- An extract of the bark of the swamp red maple was once used by pioneers to make dyes.
- Swamp red maples provide a habitat for birds and other tree dwelling animals, like squirrels and raccoons, especially in swamps where large trees are sometimes scarce.
- Swamp red maples have intrusive roots, making them unfavorable to be grown near other trees or near concrete.
- Red maple ranges from southeastern Canada (where temperatures drop to -40° F) to the southeastern United States. The western range is limited by the dry climate of the Prairie States. Interestingly, the red maple is also absent from the coastal prairies of south Louisiana and east Texas. Of all the maples, it has the widest tolerance to climatic conditions.
- Red maple is a highly desirable wildlife browsing food. White-tailed deer especially use the current season's growth of red maple as an important source of winter food.

### References:

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