

SUGAR MAPLE

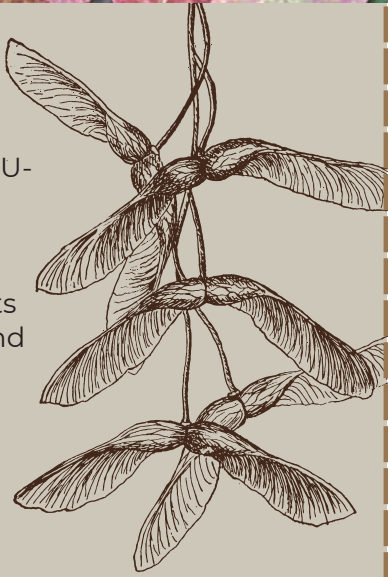
Latin: *Acher saccharinum*

Common names: Sugar, Rock Maple, Hard Maple

In Penobscot: ssènaw (sin-naw)

SEEDS

The fruit of sugar maples have a winged nutlet or double samara that is around 1 inch long and is U-shaped. They are commonly referred to as "helicopters" or "spinners" due to how they descend to the ground. The fruits appear bright green in spring and turn to a light brown in the fall. The tree also relies on the seeds found within these fruits produced by the mature trees.



BUDS

The buds that form in early spring are no larger than ¼ of an inch, sharply pointed with purplish-brown tightly overlapped scales. There are two lateral buds aside from the terminal bud.

The sugar maple tree is native to the Northern parts of the US and Eastern Parts of Canada. Sugar maple trees prefer cool and moist climates where the winters are cold. They can be found in a range of soils but prefer well-drained soils that are loamy and abundant in organic matter. Sugar maples are shade tolerant and are found growing in forests with other trees like oak, spruce, hemlock, birch, and poplar.

BARK

The saplings and younger branches of sugar maples are grey with a smooth and grey. The more mature bark will become a dark gray with a shaggy appearance. The mature bark also has large plates that begin to curl, the ridges will appear vertically and overlap one another like shingles.



LEAVES

Sugar maple have leaves that are oppositely arrange that are up to 6 inches long with typically 5 palmate lobes. The upper 3 lobes have a squarish shape to them, whereas the bottom lobes are rather pointed. The edges of the leaf also appear very smooth and are toothed sparingly. The notches of the lobes appear rounded. The stem is about the same length as the leaf and is hairless and appears a purplish-red at the base of the leafstalk in early Spring. The leaves are green on top and have a paler tone underneath. Sugar maple leaves in the fall time can range from yellow, gold, orange to red and can display these colors all at once.



FLOWERS

The flowers both contain male and female flower that self-pollinate. The flowers appear greenish-yellow with clusters of 6-12 flowers that droop downward with slender stalks that are hairy. The flowers are anywhere from 1-2.5 inches long. The flowers appear before the leaves emerge and the bloom can last from April-June.



HARVESTING

Most trees can produce syrup, it is the Sugar Maple that is sought after for market shelves because of its high sugar content and it's ability to yield sap. The tree tapping can vary from year to year depending on the temperatures. Once the buds begin to form and the freezing temperatures are no more, the syrup harvest has passed.

the hole should be drilled at a slight upward angle about 2 inches into a tree with a 10-inch diameter, standing 4 feet above the ground.

One taphole can yield anywhere from 40-80 gallons of sap in a year,

when boiled down 40 gallons of sap produces generally around 1 gallon of syrup and 10 gallons of sap equals to 1 quart.

It is recommended to boil sap outside of the home because the large amount of moisture it puts into the air.

STORAGE

Canned syrup can last for years when properly sealed. The syrup should be stored in a dark, dry, and cool place and once opened should be refrigerated. You can also freeze maple syrup which can be stored for up to a year or more.



USES

This species is vital to the ecosystem where it inhabits, providing food and shelter to a wide variety of life. The bark, twigs, and fruit are a source of food for many deer, moose squirrels, and porcupines. Many birds also build their nest and can act as buffers to help clean waterways and reduce the carbon dioxide in the air. The tree's roots and leaves also can improve the health of the soil.

Tribes all over the Northeast and Midwest would use the maple syrup components and find different ways of incorporating it into their meals. There is a record of Ojibwa people using it in vinegar mixtures to flavor their meats. Many tribes would also use the lumber for different tools and even for canoes and paddles. The sap was also used by the Iroquois to treat the eyes.

The young leaves can also be eaten raw and cooked, though moderation is essential. The seeds and bark can also be collected and be eaten raw or roasted and ground into flour. In my culture, the maple water was used as a tonic, which helps to boost the liver and kidneys. The inner bark was also cultivated to fuse into a tea that can help remedy coughs and digestive issues. Anishinaabe would also used to bark to treat gonorrhea.