

2012 October Plant of the Month



Sugar or Rock Maple *Acer saccharum* Marsh.

There may be no tree more familiar to residents of NE United States than the sugar maple. This wide spread and adaptable maple is a resident of our northern uplands where it grows with white pine, northern red oak, basswood and other northern hardwood forest denizens. *Acer saccharum* is a tree of significant stature, reaching heights up to 30 meters. Its wood is highly sought for its grain in woodworking as well as its hardness in the fireplace. It was the Iroquois who taught early New England and Acadian colonists how to tap this tree for its sweet sap, when boiled and reduced becomes a flavor known worldwide as maple syrup.

New Jersey's sugar maples are found in native distribution on the Piedmont and northern physiographic regions. The tree is a forest co-dominant on the Highlands and Valley and Ridges of Passaic, Sussex, Warren and Morris counties upland forests. Mary Hough's (1983) distribution is listed as frequent and native north of the fall line. The tree flowers in April and sets its seed for dispersal by July to September. Like many trees with landscape capabilities, this species has been used as a landscape and specimen tree well beyond its normal distribution. It can be found today as a planted tree in every NJ County.

The sugar maple shows an extreme color display once fall makes its appearance. Colors range from yellow to scarlet. These pulse throughout the Northeast, providing a unique scene each season. Colors begin in late August in Quebec at the northern limits of distribution and slowly change from summer display of green to the fall variety by late October in southern Appalachians. With winter breathing down our neck, it can be cathartic to see the last gasps of summer 2012 by taking a riding in our hardwoods of NW NJ to see our display of sugar maples, the October Plant of the Month.