

Acer campestre

[Synonyms : *Acer campestre* var. *hebecarpum*]

FIELD MAPLE is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to Europe (including Britain) and the Mediterranean to Asia Minor, it has small greenish-yellow flowers and leaves that turn yellow (sometimes flushed with red) in Autumn.

It is also known as *Acer commune* (Italian), *Ahorn* (German), *Angerbinbaum* (German), *Bardo comum* (Portuguese), Boots-and-shoes, Cat oak, Chats, Common bird's tongue, Common maple, Dog oak, English maple, *Érable champêtre* (French), European field maple, *Feldahorn* (German), Hasketts, Hedge maple, *Javor babyka* (Czech), *Javor pol'ny* (Czech), Ketty keys, Keys, Kite keys, Kit-keys, Kitty keys, Maple, Maplin tree, *Masarnwydd Lleiaf* (Welsh), Masertree, *Naverlönn* (Swedish), *Niverävaahtera* (Finnish), Oak, *Petit érable* (French), *Piccolo acero dei boschi* (Italian), *Sendeban ag* (Turkish), Shacklens, Shacklers, *Spaanse aak* (Dutch), Whistlewood, and Whitty bush; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of reserve, and retirement.

The stems contain a milky, sugary sap.

Campestre means 'of fields, meadows or open plains'.

British legend tells how children could be predicted to have a long life if they were passed through the maple's branches.

At the end of the 19th Century records show that some English country-folk in both the West Country and the Midlands still knew the field maple as Oak-apple and wore a sprig of it on Oak Apple Day (29th May). Many of them apparently were unaware that they risked being beaten with nettles (*Urtica dioica*) if the sprig was recognized as a piece of field maple not oak (*Quercus*).

The hard wood was used to make such disparate objects as writing tablets, weapons (spears, pikes and lances), bowls and platters (or trenchers), Saxon harps (similar to one found in a Saxon barrow in the southern English County of Berkshire) and tobacco (or Ulmer) pipes. It was common for the bowls to carry intricate carvings of say animals, fruit, flowers or the saints (such as St. Christopher). In fact it is understood that St. Christopher was often depicted in the bottom of the bowl, some have suggested as a consolation to the drinker when he drank the last mouthful. In more recent times the wood has been sought after by cabinet makers for veneering and making furniture, and has also been used (and still is) for inlay work and for making string and woodwind instruments, particularly guitars and violins. The traditional rippled back of violins (often known as the 'fiddle back') owes its appearance to the undulating grain of field maple which is also used for the sides, neck and scroll of the instrument. The light brown to reddish-white wood has also been employed for the shafts of billiard cues for which it is considered to be the next best wood after ash. Furthermore it has been used for making agricultural implements, and cutlery. The small branches have been made into walking sticks, and the knotted, root wood can be found in cabinet-work. In France the flexible young shoots were often fashioned into whips.

The wood has not only provided good fuel but also yields a high quality charcoal.

As a shrub it is often grown commercially as hedging and is used for supporting vines as well. Medicinally, herbalists chose the bark and leaves to deal with liver ailments and also the

treatment of sore eyes.