

Acer saccharinum

[Synonyms : *Acer dasycarpum*, *Acer eriocarpum*, *Acer saccharinum* var. *laciniatum*, *Acer saccharinum* var. *wieri*, *Acer sacchatum*, *Argentacer saccharinum*]

SILVER MAPLE.is a deciduous tree. Native to north-eastern North America it has dark red stalked, tiny yellowish-red flowers and green leaves that are silvery-white beneath and turn gold (sometimes orange and crimson as well) in Autumn.

It is also known as *Acer argenteo* (Italian), *Acer plateado* (Spanish), *Arce de Florida* (Spanish), *Arce del Canadá* (Spanish), *Arce sacarino* (Spanish), Bird's eye maple, Black maple, *Bordo prateado* (Portuguese), Broad-fruited maple, *Érable argenté* (French), *Érable à sucre* (French-Canadian), *Gin kaede* (Japanese), Hard maple, *Hopeavaahtera* (Finnish), *Javor cukrový* (Czech), *Javor stříbrný* (Czech), *Klen sakharistyi* (Russian), *Klon srebrzysty* (Polish), Maple, Papascowood, Red maple, River maple, Rock maple, Rough maple, *Silber-Ahorn* (German), Silverleaf maple, *Silverlönn* (Swedish), Soft maple, *Sølvløn* (Danish), Sugar maple, Sugar tree, Swamp maple, Water maple, White maple, *Witte Esdoorn* (Dutch), and *Zilveresdoorn* (Dutch).

The bark has an unpleasant smell if bruised or scraped. The flowers are pollinated by the wind. The branches tend to be brittle and are liable to break in high winds or under heavy snow or ice – a factor which authorities have noted has ultimately countered any perceived ornamental value.

Saccharinum is derived from Latin *saccharum* or *saccharon* (sugar) meaning 'sugary' in reference to the sap.

Silver maple sap (less sweet than that of the sugar maple, *Acer saccharum*) was used by many North American Indian tribes as a sugar or sweetener – although it is not very sweet. These include the Ponca, Chippewa, Iroquois, Omaha, Dakota and Winnebago. Some like the Chippewa also used it as a syrup. The Iroquois went further and used the dried sap (pounded and sifted) to make bread. They also mixed the sap with thimbleberries, *Rubus parviflorus* (or black raspberries, *Rubus occidentalis*) and water for a drink that was not only enjoyed during a normal day but also drunk during longhouse rituals, and they fermented the sap too to make alcohol.

The Omaha and Winnebago Indian tribes had various ways of making a black leather dye from the bark and twigs. The Cherokee used the wood for carving as well as for furniture and building, and they also used silver maple for basketry. The Chippewa fashioned the wood into gambling dice and arrows and they also made a mixture (the bark boiled with other ingredients) both for derusting and for iron and steel rust protection.

The bark was used medicinally by several North American Indian tribes (among them the Chippewa, the Iroquois and the Cherokee). Generally in infusion, it was used by the Chippewa to treat diarrhoea, some venereal disease, and fluid retention, and they also applied it to old running sores. The Cherokee prescribed it for easing cramps, some female disorders and for sore eyes as well as for treating dysentery and measles.

Like sap in some other maples, although this sap contains less sugar than some of its well known close relatives, it is still considered to be worth tapping in the early Spring, particularly from the trunks of more northern trees that experience cold winters with the warmer summers of more southern areas The sap is sometimes made into a soft drink and

it is also concentrated to a syrup used to sweeten many foods and is occasionally made into maple sugar. The dried, ground inner bark has been used locally as a thickening agent for soups and has been added to cereals in breadmaking.

As with other close relatives, the leaves were thought to have some preservative qualities and were wrapped around apples (*Malus*) and some root crops before storage.

The tree has been cultivated in parts of North America as both a shade tree and an ornamental feature. (However authorities note that it is wise to plant it in positions where its invasive roots cannot penetrate sewerage and drainage systems or undermine footpaths and, in the event that its brittle branches fall, that they are unlikely to damage objects or harm people.)

The seeds are eaten by birds and small animals (including squirrels) and in some areas beavers are especially partial to this bark. Rabbits and deer eat foliage within reach – and some authorities note that its buds often emerge at a pivotal time for squirrels as they provide a source of food when little else is available for them.

Its wood (which has been referred to as ‘bird’s-eye maple’ used for woodwork) has been employed for a wide range of uses from veneering, pulp, flooring (occasionally), turning, cooperage and motor vehicle parts to inexpensive furniture, boxes, crates, shoe lasts and heels, and sports equipment. It has also been used as fuel.

Wood ashes have provided potash which, in the past, has even been exported as a fertiliser.

Silver maple is believed to have been introduced to Britain in 1735.