

# Plant "Imagination"

## ***THE MAPLE TREE***

Maple trees are common throughout the United States, however they are mostly seen in the temperate portions of the country. More than 200 species of maple trees exist, growing anywhere from 15 to 70 feet tall. Maple trees are best known for their brilliant fall foliage and for maple syrup production.

Native Americans first used maple sap to create a sweet substance they called "sweetwater." Maple sap is in season in what is known as sugar season, for four to six weeks. March, the prime month, is when the sap runs. It takes up to three decades for sugar maples to be ready to be tapped for syrup. The production of 1 quart of syrup requires about 10 gallons of sap.

Maple trees' wood has many uses. The most valuable maples for timber are the sugar maple and the sycamore maple. Sugar maple wood, also known as hard maple, is used to make items as diverse as bowling pins, drums and butcher's blocks. Flame maple trees and quilt maples are prized for their highly decorative wood grain. Maple is also often used to make instruments, such as guitars because it carries sound waves well.

Regardless of the species, all varieties of maple tree leaves have three principal veins. These veins radiate up from the base of the leaf. However, not all maple leaves are lobed in accordance to the veins, most species do. When young, maple leaves are bright red but soon fade into green. Maple tree leaves can range from red and yellow to purple in the autumn. Color depends on the variety of maple tree.

Maple trees require nutrient-rich soil with good drainage in order to thrive. If planting a maple tree, choose a spot that receives full sunlight. The best time to plant a maple tree is in the fall but before the first frost. Maple trees like a good deal of moisture, and recently-planted trees should be watered on a regular basis. In order to produce sap, sugar maples need nighttime temperatures to drop below freezing.

***This is the time of year to appreciate the magic of the Fall colors***