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The Time-Honoured Sugar Maple

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The Time-Honoured Sugar Maple

Autumn is here! The colorful leaves of trees are falling, the days are getting shorter, the air has a crispness to it, and the rain has finally returned to the area giving some much needed moisture to many thirsty plant materials. When I think of Fall, the ever-popular Sugar Maple comes to mind. This native tree of Minnesota can be found as far west as South Dakota and eastward to Maine. It is the state tree of our friends across the Mississippi river in Wisconsin. As most people know, Sugar Maple sap is collected in late winter and boiled down to make maple syrup. But did you know that it takes about 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup?

The Sugar Maple is often referred to as a hard maple. The wood is extremely hard and used in furniture, flooring, and cabinets. As a landscape tree the Sugar Maple makes an excellent shade tree. When given enough space, it can grow up to 50-70 ft. and it has a nearly perfect shape. A couple of considerations with the Sugar Maple; 1) it thrives in full sun but does not like compacted soils, 2) as it matures the Sugar Maple creates dense shade making it difficult to grow grass under the tree, and 3) during the winter months it is susceptible to sunscald and is highly intolerant of road salt.

One easy way to identify the Sugar Maple is to examine the leaves. The leaf of the Sugar Maple has five lobes that point outward. The Red Maple leaf is smaller and has three lobes that point inward. Interestingly, in autumn when the Sugar Maple leaves fall from the tree, they break down quickly making it an excellent organic fertilizer.

It is in the fall that the Sugar Maple shines, displaying its brilliant autumn colors. They range from yellow- orange to red reminding one of a summer sunset. 'Bonfire' is a cultivar having an unusually deep red color. In recent years WSU has lost most of its Minnesota native Sugar Maples due to construction or extreme soil compaction. As a result a new Sugar Maple, 'Flax Mill Majesty', was planted near the Tau Center this past spring. Ongoing efforts are made each year to update WSU's "Minnesota Collection" or the 52 trees that are native to Minnesota.

The newest WSU garden is currently in the planning stages for the Child Center at Wabasha. June Reineke is working with Ed Becker from Winona Nursery to create a Child Science Garden. Included in this project would be a bird, butterfly, and bee garden, exploratory displays, a raised bridge, and sitting areas. Five new trees will be added to Wabasha Street that will attract birds and be of special interest to children. The beautification of the WSU campus continues.

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Retired 2010
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