USDA NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Plant Fact Sheet

SILVER MAPLE

Acer saccharinum L.

Plant Symbol = ACSA2

Contributed by: USDA NRCS New York State Office

© William S. Justice
Smithsonian Institution
@ USDA NRCS PLANTS

Uses

Forest Buffers: Silver maple is a natural for use in riparian forest buffer installations due to its adaptation to such sites. However it should be used as a relatively minor percentage of the species mix because of its tendency to outgrow other species and mature at an early age. Where silver maple is already present in nearby stands, it should not be planted as it will show up in short order anyway. This species is much preferred to box elder in any planting.

Wildlife: Silver maple is not notable for its attractiveness to wildlife, but as a source of fast shading, large woody debris, and litter in streams the species has few rivals. It seems to be a preferred nesting species for Baltimore orioles.

Biofuels: The species is one of only a few that has the growth rate for serious consideration for biofuel production. Though shrub willow and poplar hybrids are currently receiving greater attention, silver maple has been tested for this use in the Midwest.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Acer saccharinum L., silver maple is one of the fastest growing deciduous trees of the eastern and midwestern forests. Also called river maple, this name derives from the common occurrence of the species along our river systems. Silver maple shares many of its sites with red maple, but the two species are easily distinguished. Silver maple is typically a much larger tree with a much larger fruit (called a samara), but the two species are the only native maples with spring seed dispersal. The leaves of silver maple are often larger and more deeply fissured between lobes than those of red maple. Silver maple can grow 3-7 feet per year.

Adaptation and Distribution

Silver maple is adapted wherever adequate moisture is assured, but grows best on well drained but moist river bottom soils. It is rarely found at higher elevations in the uplands. The brittle nature of its wood limits the longevity of the species where high winds or heavy ice accumulations are common. As a pioneer species, silver maple is shade intolerant.

Silver maple is distributed throughout most of the eastern United States. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

Silver maple is among the easiest of trees to establish from seed or transplants. Its rapid growth competes well with other plants, although grass and weed control will improve survival and allow for even better growth. The seed germinates rapidly, and streambanks underneath mature trees are often covered with seedlings shortly after seed dispersal in the late spring, especially along the waterline. The rapid growth means that seedlings are almost always out-planted as 1-0 stock.

Management
In buffer plantings the only management needed is grass and weed control and livestock exclusion. Silver maple is not usually damaged by deer browsing, and is not a preferred target of gypsy moth caterpillars.

On sites where natural regeneration produces too many saplings thinning should be carried out to allow other species to survive.

Pests and Potential Problems
Like other maples, this species will be devastated by the Asian longhorn beetle if that pest escapes eradication efforts in our port cities.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)
A few horticultural selections may exist in the market, but for conservation plantings seedlings from regional wild sources should be utilized.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:
John Dickerson, retired
USDA NRCS New York State Office
Syracuse, New York

Edited: 31Jan2002 JLK; 24may06jsp

For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site<http://plants.usda.gov> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>