THE BIG TREES OF MICHIGAN
31. Acer saccharinum L.
Silver Maple

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The new state champion Silver Maple is also the new national champion. It is located in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula in Luce County, NE of Newberry, MI, at McPhee’s Landing on the Tahquamenon River in section 22 of T 46 N, R 9 W.

Description of the Species: The Silver Maple is a member of the family Aceraceae. There are at least eight species of maples in Michigan. The Silver Maple leaf is quite distinctive. It has three main lobes with narrow sinuses between them (See Fig. 1). The terminal lobe is more than one-half the length of the entire leaf blade. The sinuses between the lobes are acute at the base, forming a distinct angle. The lobes are frequently toothed all the way to the base of each (Voss, 1985). The under surface is usually a silvery green and the upper surface is a darker green. Fall leaf color is usually bright orange-red, becoming yellow later in the season.

The Silver Maple flowers early in the spring, usually in March or April. The flowers have no petals and appear before the leaf buds open. The 6–10 bud scales are red. The flowers appear in lateral, leafless umbels (Gleason & Cronquist, 1991). Some of the flowers are only staminate, while others are perfect with both stamens and pistils. The fruits are paired samaras which are each 3–6 cm long. The two samaras are attached to one another by their bases, forming a 90-degree angle with their wings pointing out. Many times only one of these samaras will have a live seed. The fruits typically mature in May and are wind dispersed. As soon as the fruits land on suitable ground, the seeds germinate (Barnes & Wagner, 1981).

The twigs are chestnut brown, slender and smooth. The inner bark of the twig produces a nasty odor when it is broken or crushed. The bark of the young branches is thin, smooth, and gray. The bark of older twigs and branches is dark gray and somewhat furrowed, spreading into loose, scaly plates that often flake off (Barnes & Wagner, 1981).

Silver Maples are common in the southern portion of the Lower Peninsula of

Michigan. They are usually found in floodplains along large rivers and in moist bottomlands of small rivers and creeks. They are sometime found in swamps that have plenty of water movement (Kricher, 1988; Barnes & Wagner, 1981; Curtis, 1959).

Many people plant Silver Maples in their landscapes and they survive quite nicely (Barnes & Wagner, 1981). They are also widely used as street trees. It is recommended, however, that they not be planted too close to buildings or power-lines, because they are brittle and become a hazard. The crotches are usually nar-
row and weak, resulting in the loss of branches during wind and ice storms. Silver Maples are fast growing. They are also moderately long-lived. The wood is hard and pale brown in color.

Silver Maples are found less frequently in the northern Lower Peninsula. They are also known in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan from a few disjunct sites (Merz, 1978). The state and national champion grows in one of these sites. Normally, Silver Maples are found in association with Eastern Cottonwood, Populus deltoides; American Elm, Ulmus americana; Red Maple, Acer rubrum; Box-elder, Acer negundo; and Northern Hackberry, Celtis occidentalis (Barnes & Wagner, 1981).

**Location of Michigan's Big Tree:** The state and national champion Silver Maple is located northeast of Newberry in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The tree is growing on the southern bank of the Tahquamenon River about 7 m from the water in normal years. The tree is about 100 m east of the boat launch at McPhee’s Landing at the end of County Road 462. To get to McPhee’s Landing from Newberry, Michigan, go north on M-123 out of Newberry. County Road 462 is about one-half mile past the railroad tracks. Take County Road 462 east until it ends at the Tahquamenon River.

**Description of Michigan's Big Tree:** The trunk of the tree is becoming hollow. The hollow portion is small and has signs that animals are occupying it. Much of the original trunk of this tree died years ago, leaving a trunk base about 5 m tall. Below this the tree sprouted and produced many branches. Because of this, there are many large trunks growing straight up. In November of 1999, one of these large branches fell in a severe windstorm. The portion of the tree that fell was 77 feet (23.5 m) long. The stump that was left is 18 feet (6m) tall. The tree is very old and the bark is covered with lichens and bryophytes at its base. This tree is growing in a floodplain of the Tahquamenon River and old high water marks are apparent on the bark from past floods. There are many holes in the dirt around the tree roots probably produced by digging animals and the action of floodwaters.

Ehrle (1997) had earlier reported that the largest Silver Maple in Michigan had a girth of 297 inches (754 cm), a height of 79 feet (24.1 m) and a crown spread of 77 feet (23.5 m). The new champion has a girth of 347 inches (881 cm) a height of 115 feet (35.1 m) and a crown spread of 61 feet (18.6 m). In order to be the state champion tree only the girth in inches is considered, but a calculated score determines the national champion tree. The score is determined by adding the girth in inches to the height in feet and adding one-quarter of the crown spread. The previous national champion tree is in Columbus, WI. It has a girth of 293 inches (744 cm), height of 115 feet (35.1 m) and a crown spread of 110 feet (33.5 m) (Fedor, 2002). Its score was 436. The new proposed Michigan national champion tree has a score of 477.25.

**INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE**

If you would like to join us in extending this series of articles by visiting and describing one or more of Michigan’s Big Trees, please contact Elwood B. Ehrle...
for help with locations, specifications for taking measurements, and assistance with the manuscript. The Michigan Botanical Club encourages your involvement in this activity. Please remember to ask permission before entering private property.

LITERATURE CITED


