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Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*), Nebraska Forest Service

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Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*)

Nebraska Forest Service

Silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*) is not highly recommended but it is perhaps one of the most common maples planted in cities across the eastern United States and into the prairie states. The tree is easy to plant and grow and quite honestly, it is hard to kill. But it does have its drawbacks and that has given it a bad reputation in tree planting circles.



Silver maple was and still is widely planted in urban areas and is primarily a wet site tree in rural areas. It was often included with a new home since it is relatively inexpensive and easy to establish. The tree gets its name because of the silvery undersides of the leaf. When winds blow the tree shows a kind of bicolor effect of silver and green hues in the canopy. Silver maple is native to most of the eastern half of the United States, except for the Atlantic Coast and Florida.

Silver maple can become a very large tree. The largest specimen in the United States is 347 inches in circumference, 116 feet tall and has an average spread of 61 feet. It is located in Newberry, Michigan.



The leaves of silver maple are dark green above and silvery underneath. One of the most common characteristics is the silver maple seed that falls in the late spring like helicopters. Silver maple is a prolific seeder and the seeds can clog gutters and downspouts. The seed is a paired samara or winged seed. It is relatively easy to grow silver maple from seed.

Silver maple has a tendency to sprout from the base and will sometimes form a multiple stemmed tree when young. Silver maple does not have the ability to resist and compartmentalize decay as well as some other species and a damaged tree is open to more serious breakage from weakened branches and stems. In addition, silver maple has a habit of forming a root system that is more surface oriented than most other trees. Roots will run right along the surface of the soil and become a problem for mowing and other yard activities, especially in heavy or compacted soils.

Silver maple has a variety of pests including anthracnose leaf spot and bladder galls. Most are not serious...remember the tree is hard to kill.

Why even consider this tree if it has so many drawbacks. It is a fast grower and is good on soils that need improvement and where most other plants will not grow. It can be very attractive in large open areas on the edge of the farmhouse landscape and it does create very good shade in a short amount of time. It can also be used for reforestation with other species and as a windbreak tree. It is best not to plant the tree near homes or buildings. There are some varieties of maples that are a cross between silver maple and other maples. The "Blair" silver maple is said to have stronger branching habits but that is not scientifically proven. "Celebration" and "Autumn Blaze" are a red/silver maple cross and are considered much more useful in the landscape with excellent fall coloration.

So there is a place for the much maligned silver maple. Maybe you can find a spot on your property.