



## *Acer rubrum* 'Red Sunset' 'Red Sunset' Red Maple<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

'Red Sunset' and 'October Glory' have proven to be the best cultivars of Red Maple for the south (Fig. 1). 'Red Sunset' has strong wood and is a vigorous, fast-grower, reaching a height of 50 feet with a spread of 25 to 35 feet. Trees are often seen shorter in the southern part of its range unless located on a wet site. This tree is preferred over Red Maple, Silver Maple or Boxelder when a fast-growing maple is needed, and will take on a pyramidal or oval silhouette. The newly emerging red flowers and fruits signal that spring has come. They appear in December and January in Florida, later in the northern part of its range. Leaves retain an attractive high gloss throughout the growing season. The seeds of 'Red Sunset' Red Maple are quite popular with squirrels and birds.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Acer rubrum* 'Red Sunset'

**Pronunciation:** AY-ser ROO-brum

**Common name(s):** 'Red Sunset' Red Maple

**Family:** *Aceraceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 4B through 8 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** native to North America

**Uses:** Bonsai; wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; screen; shade tree; specimen; residential street tree

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

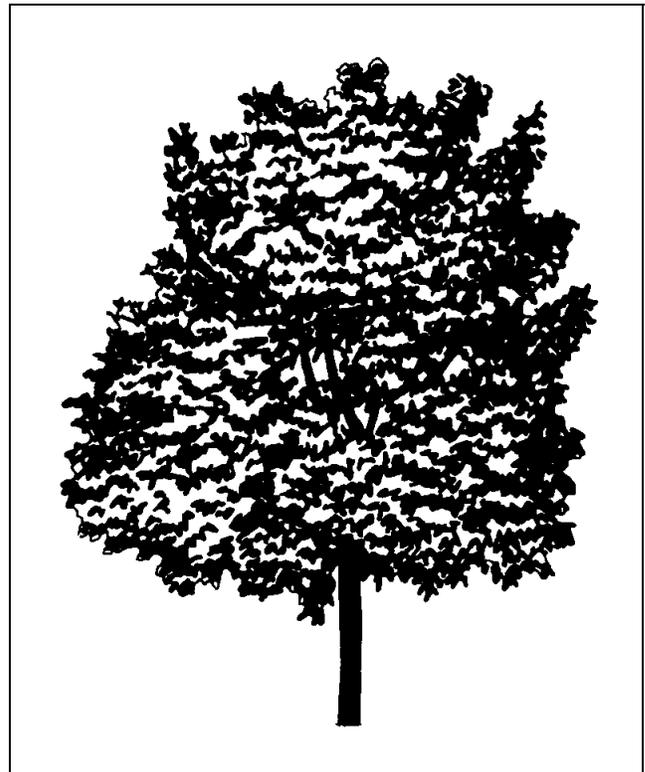


Figure 1. Middle-aged 'Red Sunset' Red Maple.

### DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 45 to 50 feet

**Spread:** 25 to 40 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** oval; upright

**Crown density:** moderate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** medium

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** lobed; incised; serrate

**Leaf shape:** star-shaped

**Leaf venation:** palmate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** orange; red

**Fall characteristic:** showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** red

**Flower characteristics:** showy; spring flowering;  
winter flowering

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** red

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; attracts squirrels  
and other mammals; no significant litter problem;  
showy

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily  
damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree  
grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or  
pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; not  
particularly showy; should be grown with a single  
leader; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop  
strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** gray; reddish

**Current year twig thickness:** medium

**Wood specific gravity:** 0.54

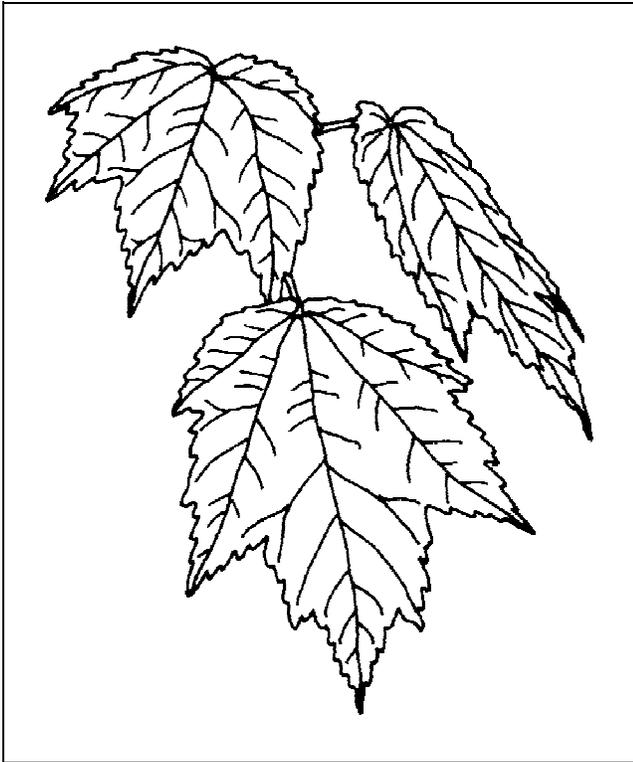


Figure 3. Foliage of 'Red Sunset' Red Maple.

## Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun;  
tree grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; extended  
flooding; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** low

**Soil salt tolerance:** poor

## Other

**Roots:** surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere  
with mowing

**Winter interest:** tree has winter interest due to  
unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter  
trunk, or winter flowers

**Outstanding tree:** tree has outstanding ornamental  
features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not  
affected by pests

## USE AND MANAGEMENT

The outstanding ornamental characteristic of 'Red  
Sunset' red maple is the brilliant orange to red fall  
color lasting several weeks. 'Red Sunset' red maple is

often one of the first trees to color up in autumn, and  
it puts on one of the most brilliant displays of any  
tree. 'Red Sunset' will color-up before 'October  
Glory'. In Auburn University's trials, it was rated the  
best cultivar of Red Maple for the south, although like  
other Red Maples there is occasional bark splitting on  
the southwest side of the trunk during the winter. It is  
one of the highest rated trees in Ohio Shade Tree  
Evaluation trials. It is well-suited as a street tree in  
northern and mid-southern climates in residential and  
other suburban areas.

The tree makes the best growth in wet or moist  
places and has no particular soil texture preference.  
However, chlorosis may develop on alkaline soil. The  
tree grows rapidly and has a dense canopy in the sun  
but opens up in partial shade. Irrigation is often  
needed to support street tree plantings in well-drained  
soil in the south. However it appears to adapt to no  
irrigation in the south on a site where roots can  
explore an unlimited soil space. Roots do not often  
raise sidewalks as Silver Maples do because of a  
slower growth rate and less aggressive root system.  
'Red Sunset' Red Maple is easily transplanted and  
usually develops surface roots in soil ranging from  
well-drained sand to clay. It is not especially drought  
tolerant on sandy soils, particularly in the southern part  
of the range, although it has proven tolerant of clay  
soil.

Propagation is by grafting or cuttings but own-root  
cuttings are preferred to avoid graft-incompatibilities.

## Pests

Aphids infest maples, usually Norway Maple, and  
may be numerous at times. Usually not too serious on  
red maples. High populations can cause leaf drop.  
Another sign of heavy aphid infestation is honey dew  
on lower leaves and objects beneath the tree. Aphids  
are controlled by spraying or they may be left alone.  
If not sprayed, predatory insects will bring the aphid  
population under control.

Scales are an occasional problem on maples.  
Perhaps the most common is cottony maple scale. The  
insect forms a cottony mass on the lower sides of  
branches. Scales are usually controlled with  
horticultural oil sprays. Scales may also be controlled  
with well-timed sprays to kill the crawlers.

If borers become a problem it is an indication the  
tree is not growing well. Controlling borers involves  
keeping trees healthy. Chemical controls of existing

infestations are more difficult. Proper control involves identification of the borer infesting the tree then applying insecticides at the proper time.

## **Diseases**

Scorch occurs during periods of high temperatures accompanied by wind, particularly in areas with limited soil space where roots cannot expand into a large soil volume. Trees with diseased or inadequate root systems will also show scorching. Scorch symptoms are light brown or tan dead areas between leaf veins. The symptoms are on all parts of the tree or only on the side exposed to sun and wind. Scorching due to dry soil may be prevented by watering. If scorching is due to an inadequate or diseased root system, watering will have no effect.

Nutrient deficiency symptoms are yellow or yellowish-green leaves with darker green veins. The most commonly deficient nutrient on maple is manganese. Implanting capsules containing a manganese source in the trunk will alleviate the symptoms. Test soil samples to determine if the soil pH is too high for best manganese availability. Plants exposed to weed killers may also show similar symptoms.

Girdling roots grow around the base of the trunk rather than growing away from it. As both root and trunk increase in size, the root chokes the trunk. Girdling roots are detected by examining the base of the trunk. The lack of trunk flare at ground level is a symptom. The portion of the trunk above a girdling root does not grow as rapidly as the rest so may be slightly depressed. The offending root may be on the surface or may be just below the sod. The tree crown shows premature fall coloration and death of parts of the tree in more serious cases. If large portions of the tree have died it may not be worth saving. Girdling roots are functional roots so when removed a portion of the tree may die. When the girdling root is large the treatment is as harmful as the problem. After root removal, follow-up treatment includes watering during dry weather. The best treatment for girdling roots is prevention by removing or cutting circling roots at planting or as soon as they are detected on young trees.