Native Plant of the Month

Big-leaf Maple

Acer macrophyllum

- Big-leaf maple leaves can be as large as a foot across, certainly qualifying it for its common and scientific name (macro= large + phyllum= leaf).
- This is one of the most important deciduous trees in our ecosystem, providing habitat for wildlife of all kinds, and as a key plant in the succession from disturbed land to forests.
- The hard, dense wood is desirable for woodworking of all kinds. Historically, it was used by native people for canoe paddles, spindle whorls, serving platters, food ladles, mallets, and other useful implements.

Landscape Value

A fast-growing, large tree, big-leaf maple is not typically planted in landscapes, but the airborne seeds often plant themselves. They can make a wonderful addition to a large yard providing summer shade, and a great home for tree forts and rope swings.

Allow to grow as a specimen tree surrounded by groundcovers or lawn, or grow in a woodland edge with western hemlock and red cedar.

In early spring this tree is adorned with white-green flower clusters, which transform into the well-known winged-seed 'helicopters' that fly through the air in fall breezes. The leaves change to bright yellows in fall, eventually becoming piles of leaves excellent for garden mulch.

Text by Heidi Bohan
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