

A Smaller Maple – the Amur

Published 10/7/2020 - Amur maple on north Roosevelt Avenue, taken Oct. 6, 2020

Maples are, and always have been, crowd favorites. Planted in the right areas they can stand out as a solitary specimen tree or combine with other tree species to help create season-long interest. The staple maple variety in our area is the Autumn Blaze or Sienna Glen. Sienna's took the place of Autumn Blazes fairly recently; Autumn Blaze is preferred along the I-29 corridor and points east. The Sienna's are more consistent performers for our area possibly due to our hotter and drier summers, high soil alkalinity, both, or maybe something else. No matter what, when these trees are mature they can easily top out at 50' with widths about half their height. That can be a problem especially with smaller residential lots. But there is another maple option!



The Amur maple, *Malus ginnala*, is well suited to our area and will grow to 15-20' tall and 20' wide. They can have single trunks, multiple trunks, or are even available in shrub form. Their canopy is not as evenly structured as some trees but their overall shape is nicely rounded. Once established they are very hardy making them an excellent choice for a xeriscape landscape. Other than their much more compact size, their most outstanding feature is their spectacular fall color, best described as scarlet red.

Now there is no such perfect plant for every situation, but there are perfect plants for specific situations. The Amur does have one little habit making it not the perfect plant for all areas. The Amur does bring spring flowers, nice aromatic white blooms, but along with flowers in the spring are seeds in the fall. These seeds produce saplings that in some states are considered invasive and will eventually out compete some native understory trees and shrubs. Recommendations range from “do not plant at all” to “do not plant within 100 yards of a natural area.” Our state does not have a restriction on them and the states with restrictions receive much more annual rainfall than we do in central South Dakota. The less rainfall, the less chance of a successfully germinated seed getting through the sapling stage.

Most properties within cities are nowhere close to a natural plant area let alone within 100 yards. It's the combination of the majority of landscapes not having neighboring native areas, much less annual rainfall than areas where Amur's pose problems, and the smaller tree size that makes the Amur maple a good choice for landscapes in our area.

Any saplings that do become established where you don't want them can easily be pulled or dug up in garden beds and mowed over in lawns. For established groves that are not wanted, some use prescribed burns to control them. Be aware especially for those who live in town, prescribed burns will probably be frowned upon by your immediate neighbors.

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