

# Soft Maple

Botanical Name: *Acer rubrum*.

**Distribution:** More than ten species of this genus grow in north temperate regions of Canada and the U.S. and on the pacific coast, but only about five species are important sources of timber. Maples are famed for their brilliant spectrum of multi-colored autumn leaves of yellow, golden-orange and red. Soft maple is provided by both *Acer rubrum* (known as red maple, silver maple, Manitoba maple, and ash-leaf maple) and *Acer saccharinum* (silver maple) which is one of the largest and fastest growing of all the maples. It reaches 130 feet tall. Red maple is smaller, reaching only 98 feet tall with a diameter of 2 to 4 feet. *Acer macrophyllum* produces the pacific maple which is called Oregon maple or Big Leaf Maple. Ash Leaf maple is actually box elder which is an inferior wood to soft maple.

**Appearance:** The sapwood is a cream-white in color with a close, straight grain and indistinct growth rings on plain-sawn surfaces. The heartwood tends towards reddish-brown. The texture is even, fine and slightly less lustrous than rock maple and lighter in weight. Lumber is generally sold unselected for color. Helena Hardwoods stocks the WHAD (Worm Holes are a Defect) grade of Select and Better Soft Maple.

**Properties:** The weight of *Acer rubrum* is about 38 pounds per cubic foot while *Acer macrophyllum* is about 34 pounds per foot. The wood dries rather slowly with little degrade and there is medium movement in service. Soft maple is of medium density, with good bending and crushing strengths and low stiffness and shock resistance. Its Average Comparative Hardness Index is 73, about 25% less hard than hard maple. It has a good steam bending classification and works well with both hand and machine tools in all operations, as it offers only a moderate blunting effect on tools. Nailing and screwing are very good. Gluing is variable. The wood can be brought to a good finish. The wood is non-durable and moderately resistant to preservative treatment. Wood accepts stain well. The sapwood is liable to insect attack.

**Uses:** This attractive wood is softer and lower in strength than rock maple but is eminently suitable for furniture making, interior joinery work, interior trim, turning and domestic woodware, including boxes and crates. Specialized uses include shoe lasts, musical instruments and piano actions.



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