



# THE SUGAR MAPLE

## *(Acer saccharum)*

by Logan Nelson with excerpts from  
*The Meaning of Trees* by Fred Hagender

**Symbolism:** Expansion

**Astrological Association:** Jupiter

**Special Significance in Wisconsin:** State Tree

**Superstitions:** The Roman grammarian, Servius, noted in c. 400 CE that, as the Trojan horse had been made from maple wood, the maple was a tree that brought bad luck.

The maple is also featured in many myths and legends of many Native American tribes. The Iroquois legend of *"The Hunting of a Great Bear"* relates how four brothers were hunting an enormous bear. After a long, arduous chase, they finally struck him down at the top of a mountain. However, this was no ordinary bear or mountain. In fact, legend says that the bear comes back to life every autumn and the four brothers must chase and kill him annually. The mountain that the chase takes place on is actually in the heavens. It is said that the four brothers make up the constellation of the Great Bear and that when they kill the Great Bear annually, the bear's blood falls down from the heavens and paints the maple leaves scarlet.

**Practical Uses:** The tough and fine-grained maple wood is suitable for high-quality carving of musical instruments and ornamental bowls. In North America, many indigenous tribes have traditionally used maple wood to make paddles, oars, baskets, and furniture.

The Chilula of northern California used maple bark in a most original way to make dresses for women. The bark was peeled in the spring, pounded into a thin cloth-like material, and sewn into summer dresses.

But probably the most familiar practical use of the sugar maple in the spring is the tapping and collecting of sap for maple syrup.

Pure maple syrup is considered precious because it contains balanced sugars, minerals such as potassium, calcium, magnesium, manganese, vitamins A, B2, B5 and B6, folic acid, niacin, biotin and proteins. It is no wonder it takes about 30-40 gallons of sap to create one gallon of a material so nutritiously tasty.