

# Big Leaf Maple (*Acer Macrophyllum*)

Also known as - Oregon Maple

**RECOGNITION:** As the name suggests, the leaves are very large, up to 60 cm wide. The tree grows up to 30 m high and the bark has distinctive ridges. The seed case is covered in thick fur.



**Habitat:** Found along the Western coast of British Columbia and south into the United States, the Big Leaf Maple grows amongst other woods such as Douglas-Fir, Western Hemlock, Red Alder, Black Cottonwood and Western Red Cedar. It prefers coarse, gravel soils with lots of moisture and it is moderately shade tolerant tree. Big Leaf Maples will be the first trees to grow on a new site or clearing, and often precedes the growth of conifers.



**Size and Form:** It is the largest and fastest growing Maple in Western Canada. It grows up to 30 m in height and 100 cm in diameter. These trees live to be 250 years old. The trunk divided into spreading limbs to support a broad rounded crown. In the forest, the trunk may be branch free for more than half of the length of the tree before the limbs spread out to form part of the forest canopy. The root system is wide spread but shallow.



**Leaves:** The very large leaves are shiny and dark green in colour with a paler undersurface. The ends of the 5 lobes narrow inwardly, toward the base which is separated by deep u-shaped notches. Sometimes the notches can be closed by the overlapping of the lobes. The edges of the leaf are decorated with irregular, blunt teeth. The stalk has a milky sap that can be seen when the stalk is cut or broken. In autumn, the leaves turn a bright orange or yellow colour.



**Bark:** The bark holds moisture well and it is not unusual for the trunk of the Big Leaf Maple to become home to mosses, ferns and liverworts.



**Buds:** The buds are blunt, green to red in colour with 3 to 4 overlapping scales. Dot like bundle scars appear on the leaf scar. This is the highest number on any Canadian Maple.



**Flowers:** Drooping clusters of flowers are arranged along a single, hairy, 10 - 15 cm long stem. The flowers appear before the leaves are fully formed. They are small, about 10 mm across and fragrant. Pollen flowers and seed flowers are found in the same cluster.



**Fruits and Seeds:** The seed case of the black maple is covered with fine hair. Clusters of keys hang from the tree until early autumn when they reach maturity. The wings spread apart at a slight angle and are approximately 30 - 40 mm in length.

**Wood:** This tree is important to British Columbia as the supply of hardwood is limited on the west coast. The wood is used in the production of musical instruments, furniture, paneling. It is light brown in colour and moderately hard



**Notes:** The species is related to the Big Leaf Maple grown in Europe, however the only reported growth in North America is on the west coast. In the open the branches begin low on the trunk supporting a large, round, and wide-spreading crown. This leaves only a small portion of the trunk free from branches.