Invasive Plant Alert[1]

Sycamore Maple

Acer pseudoplatanus L.

Native to Europe and western Asia, sycamore maple was introduced to the mid-Atlantic region as early as the 1870s. Massive seed production and a broad ecological tolerance have made it a concern; dense stands can crowd out natives.

Identification

Sycamore maple, otherwise known as mock plane, is named for its superficial resemblance to members of the *Plantus* genus, plane trees such as the American sycamore. Ubiquitously labeled as tall, individuals can reach over 30 m in height, with large, circular crowns. As trees age their smooth, grey bark becomes scaly, revealing the pale brown to orange bark underneath.

Figure 1 L.J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org.

Leaves are opposite and palmate, with 5 coarsely toothed lobes. The top side of the leaf is often dark green with a lighter green underside; however, varieties have been cultivated with leaves that are yellow, purple, or salmon-colored. The leathery texture of the leaves distinguishes them from those of most other maples.

Small yellowish-green flowers bloom in spring, producing nectar that attracts insect pollinators. A single tree may have more than 800 inflorescences, and each inflorescence can result in 30 fruits. Maturing in late summer and early fall, fruits are nutlets with two broad samaras (wings) to assist in dispersal. Intense dispersal occurs within 200 m of the parent plant, but a dispersal distance of 4 km has been recorded.

Figure 2 L.J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org.

Introduction & Distribution

Sycamore maple was primarily introduced as an ornamental; its ability to tolerate pollution, wind, salt, and a variety of soil types made it an ideal candidate for street and park planting. It has also seeded into disturbed areas such as abandoned fields, roadsides, vacant lots, and forest edges, and its present range extends from areas between Maine and Michigan and as far south as North Carolina.

Management & Removal

Information about sycamore maple management in North America is limited. Two states, Connecticut and Massachusetts, have prohibited the species from being sold or planted. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources suggests control measures employed for the invasive Norway maple, including removing seedlings, girdling, and using herbicide.

In Europe, repeated cutting has been cited as a management strategy. However, it is extremely labor intensive and may be more effective when paired with herbicide application. Grazing may also become an effective means of removal, as seedlings are considered highly palatable to several deer species in Europe.

Many native trees are listed as alternatives to the sycamore maple, such as sugar maple, red oak, American basswood, and white ash.

Resources

Invasive plants in Pennsylvania: sycamore maple. http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/ucmprd1/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_010224.pdf

Weidema, I. & Buchwald, E. (2007): Invasive Alien Species Fact Sheet – Acer pseudoplatanus, NOBANIS. http://www.nobanis.org/files/factsheets/Acer_pseudoplatanus.pdf

[1]This species has been identified as a potential or emerging threat to natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region

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