

Maine Tree Species Fact Sheet

Common Name: Boxelder (Ashleaf Maple)

Botanical Name: *Acer negundo*



Tree Type: Deciduous

Physical Description:

Growth Habit: Boxelder is a short-lived, fast growing brittle tree that is very prone to ice and wind damage. Although boxelder is most commonly found on moist soil, it is drought and cold tolerant and is frequently used in windbreaks. Boxelder usually develops a shallow, fibrous root system. The leaves are opposite and compound, with 3-7 leaflets per leaf. The leaves vary greatly in shape, often lobed and un-lobed leaflets are found on the same leaf. They are bright green above and lighter green beneath. The stems are green to reddish brown, often covered with a waxy whitish bloom that can be rubbed off. The leaf scars encircle the stem and meet at a sharp angle. The bark is gray-brown in color, slightly ridged and furrowed and has a pungent odor when bruised.

Height: Boxelder reaches a maximum height of 50 feet and has a trunk diameter of 2 feet.

Shape: Boxelder is usually rounded to broad-rounded in outline. Branches develop irregularly to support the uneven crown. It is often a small “alley cat” tree with a multi-stemmed character and ragged appearance.

Fruit/Seed Description/Dispersal Methods:

Boxelder is dioecious with imperfect flowers. The flowers are yellowish green and appear from March to April. Male flowers are born in corymbs and female flowers are in slender pendulous racemes and usually in great quantity. The fruit is a 1-1 ½ inch yellowish green samara with a 60 degree angle. It matures in September or October and persists into winter. The tree begins producing seeds when it is 8-11 years old.

Range within Maine:

Boxelder is not native to Maine; it was introduced along the Saint John River in Aroostook County and is largely planted as an ornamental tree throughout the state. This tree is hardy to Zone 3.

Distinguishing Features:

The twigs of the boxelder are covered with a white, chalky bloom and the bark yields a pungent odor when bruised.

Interesting Features:

The sap of the boxelder has been used to a limited extent for syrup.

The wood is light, soft, creamy white and often tinged with green. It is weak and close-grained and is occasionally used for pulp.

Relationship to Wildlife:

Many species of birds and animals use the seeds and other portions of the tree for food.

Landscape Use:

Extensive use in the landscape is limited due to the Boxelder's lack of ornamental assets. It has a ragged appearance, is very prone to wind and ice damage and is short-lived.

Common Problems or Pests of the Tree in Maine:

Verticillium wilt is the only notable killing disease of boxelder. It is also susceptible to root rots, and cankers. The boxelder aphid, boxelder gall midge and the boxelder bug are a problem for this tree. The orange and black boxelder bug, *Leptocoris* (Boisea) *trivittatus*, is one of the most common household pests in the United States and is usually found wherever boxelders are grown. The adults emit a foul odor, stain fabric and may cause severe asthmatic reactions. A number of leaf-feeding and scale insects and borers, also attack this species.

References:

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