

Autumn Blaze® Maple



Autumn Blaze® maple is a fast-growing tree with brilliant fall color.

Like its silver maple parent, Autumn Blaze® grows quickly. The growth rate of this cultivar is about four times faster than that of a red maple. Under optimal conditions it can grow 3 feet or more per year. Eventually it will grow 40-60 feet tall and 40-50 feet wide. At maturity it will have an oval to rounded crown with ascending branches and a well-defined central leader. This tree is not as susceptible to storm damage as silver maple because it has superior crotch angles and a well-balanced branching habit (inherited from its red maple parent) but still has the weaker wood characteristic of the silver maple. It grows in a very uniform shape, so requires little, if any, pruning. If a tree needs pruning, avoid doing this in spring, as the tree will lose large amounts of sap. The shallow root system may surface with age.

If you want a large, fast-growing tree with spectacular fall color, Autumn Blaze® maple is an excellent choice. This dependable selection of *Acer x freemanii* ('Jeffsred', P.P. No 4864) – discovered by nurseryman Glenn Jeffers in the late 1960s and introduced in 1982 by Poplar Farms, Inc. of Batavia, IL – is a hybrid of red maple (*A. rubrum*) and silver maple (*A. saccharinum*), both native to the Eastern and Central US. This hybrid combines the best features of both parents: it has the vigor and adaptability of the silver maple along with the beauty and strength of the red maple. Although the Freeman maple cultivars sold in commerce were created from controlled crosses, hybrids between red and silver maples also occur naturally in the wild. This tree will grow in a wide range of climates from Wisconsin to central Florida, and is hardy in USDA zones 3-8. Autumn Blaze® is one of the most popular hybrid maples in the US and is also very popular in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and France.



Autumn Blaze® maple grows 40-60 feet tall.

The opposite, simple, 4-6 inch long leaves are deeply cut with five palmate, pointed lobes with irregularly toothed margins. The petioles may be red or green, with more color developing where the foliage



The deeply cut palmate leaves are a medium green (L), with a silvery underside (C) and often red petioles (R).



Autumn Blaze® maple has some winter interest, with an upright oval form and reddish color to the new growth.

gets more intense sunlight. In the spring the smooth, glossy leaves have a reddish tint, while the summer foliage is a medium to dark green color on the upper surface and a silvery underside. The leaf veins are often red to reddish green, and most



Leaves turn a brilliant red-orange in fall.

noticeable on the underside. In the fall Autumn Blaze® consistently develops brilliant, long-lasting orange-red color. This intense, vivid color, as well as its rapid growth rate, is the main reason to plant this tree. It also has some winter interest, with the new growth retaining a reddish color after leaf drop that persists until the following season and red buds. The trunk has smooth, thin, gray bark that becomes slightly furrowed with age.

Freeman maples trees largely sterile. The inconspicuous red or green flowers, if present at all, are produced in dense clusters at the ends of one year old branches in spring before the tree leafs out. Some trees have both male and female flowers, while others have only male flowers, and others none. Autumn Blaze® was originally thought to be a male tree, but has produced fruit in some cases. Many cultivars produce no fruit; if fruit is produced it is a samara – a winged nutlet produced in fused pairs.



If it blooms at all, this maple flowers in early spring before leafing out (L), with inconspicuous red or green flowers in dense clusters (LC and R) which may be female, male, or both (RC).

With its distinct upright oval form, Autumn Blaze® is excellent as a specimen planting, but can also be used in groups. Because of its size it is most appropriate for the larger yard, commercial landscapes and parks (other cultivars, mentioned below, are more appropriate for smaller properties or as street trees). Its thin bark is easily damaged, so it's best not to use this tree in high pedestrian traffic areas. It can even be used in rain gardens (large ones), as it tolerates both wet and dry soils.

Plant this cultivar in full sun for best fall color. Autumn Blaze® is very adaptable to a wide range of soil conditions. It tolerates clay soil, and will withstand wet soil conditions and drought. It is not tolerant of

high soil pH, though not as sensitive as red maple. Consider it for a site that isn't right for red or sugar maple, or as a more colorful alternative in place of silver or Norway maples. This cultivar is readily available in B&B or bare root for planting in spring or fall. Because it is thin-barked, it is susceptible to frost cracks and sunscald, so it is recommended to protect young trees with tree guards during winter.

Autumn Blaze® has fewer problems with leafhoppers and verticillium wilt that adversely affect some slower growing maples. Since it's a seedless cultivar, you won't have to worry about weeding out thousands of seedlings.

There are several other selections of *A. x freemanii*, including the following. Cultivars are sometimes listed for sale as *A. rubrum* instead of *A. x freemanii*.



The bark of Autumn Blaze® maple is rather thin and damages easily.

- 'Armstrong' – is a narrow tree with ascending branches and inconsistent orange-yellow autumn color. It can grow 50-70 feet tall, but only spreads 15-20 feet. Because of its strongly upright growth habit it is often used for street planting (but not under power lines).
- Autumn Fantasy® ('DTR 102' PP7655) – grows to 50 feet tall and 40 feet wide with a broadly oval shape. The larger leaves consistently turn deep, ruby-red in autumn even in warmer climates.
- Celebration™ ('Celzam') – is a fairly compact, pyramidal tree reaching on about 15 feet high and wide, with red and gold autumn color. It can be sheared to use as a hedge.
- Firefall™ (PP 15593) – is a cross of 'Beebe Cutleaf Weeping' silver maple and 'Autumn Spire' red maple (PP 7803) released by the University of Minnesota. Growing up to 60 feet tall and 40 feet wide with an upright, oval form, and exceptional cold hardiness, this seedless cultivar with deeply cut foliage turns orange to scarlet early in the fall, so is well suited for northern areas.
- Matador™ ('Bailston') – this First Editions® selection is a smaller upright to oval tree, growing only about 45 feet tall and 40 feet wide, with deep red to orange red fall color. It colors later than many other cultivars and drops its leaves late in the season.
- Indian Summer™ ('Morgan') – is an extremely vigorous cultivar that was selected at Macdonald College in Quebec. It has good orange-red to bright red autumn color even in mild climates.
- 'Marmo' – is a selection from the collections at The Morton Arboretum with an upright, oval crown with a strong central leader that grows 40-70 feet tall with a spread of 35-40 feet. The autumn color is a blend of red and maroon with some green. This seedless cultivar with resistance to frost cracking is a Chicagoland Grows® introduction.
- Scarlet Sentinel™ ('Scarsen') – has yellow-orange to vivid red autumn color and an upright habit making it useful as a street planting and in parking areas.
- Sienna Glen® ('Sienna' PP11322) – this selection with a strong central leader that grows 50-60 feet tall and 35-40 feet wide with a rather pyramidal shape was discovered in Minnesota. The foliage turns yellow, rusty orange, and burgundy in fall.

– Susan Mahr, University of Wisconsin - Madison

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- *Acer x freemanii* 'Jeffersred' AUTUMN BLAZE – on the Missouri Botanic Garden's Kemper Center for Home Gardening website at www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?kempercode=c789
 - *Acer x freemanii* (Freeman Maple) – on the Minnesota Wildflowers website at www.minnesotawildflowers.info/tree/freeman-maple