

TREES AND SHRUBS

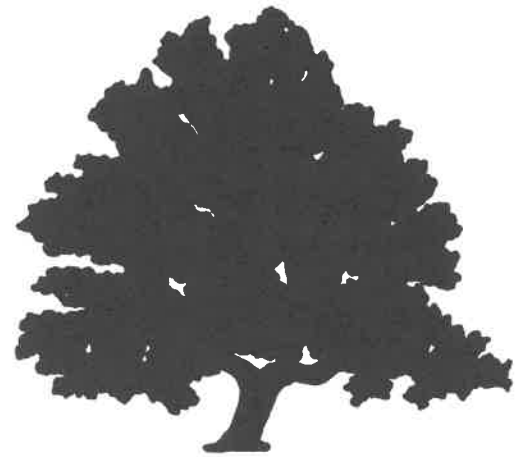
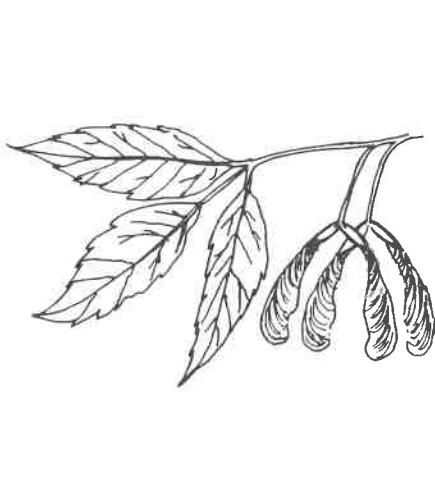
Flood Plain Prairie Species
Urban Forest Species
Windbreak Forest Species

BOXELDER

(*Acer negundo*)

Description

Acer comes from the Celtic word *ac*, meaning "hard", referring to the density of maple wood. *Negundo* is the Latinized form of the Sanskrit name for the Chaste-tree (*Vitex negundo*). The leaves of these two trees are similar. Other common names are: ash-leaf maple and Manitoba maple. Boxelder is known to the Lakota as *canśuśka*, the Omaha as *zhaba ta-zhoⁿ* and the Winnebago as *na-hosh*.

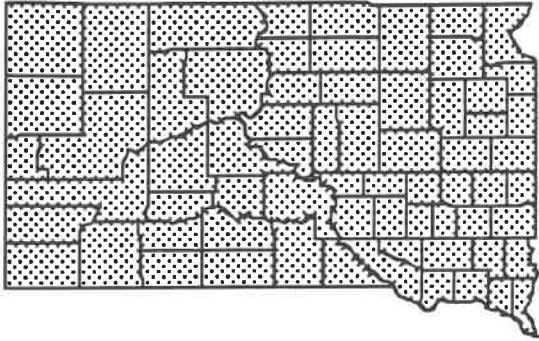


ovate, with coarsely serrated margins. Flowers are yellowish-green, blooming just before the leaves appear. Boxelders are *dioecious*, the male and female flowers occur on separate trees. The fruits are 1 to 1.5 inch (2.54 to 3.8 cm) v-shaped *samaras*. The twigs are smooth, green to purplish green, and often covered with bluish haze. Bark is light brown, becoming deeply furrowed with age.

Distribution

Boxelder is native to at least one spot in each state of the contiguous United States (except Maine, Rhode Island, Washington and Oregon). Its largest continuous range is in the Great Plains.

The boxelder is a member of the maple family, *Aceraceae*, along with silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*). The leaves are *deciduous*, *opposite*, and *pinnately compound* with 3 to 5 leaflets. Leaflets are 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 cm) long,



Native Distribution

Boxelder can be found throughout South Dakota. While associated with rivers and streams, it does not grow as close to the water as willow. Boxelder typically stay up on the flood plain along side of ash and elm. Boxelder is intermediate in tolerance to competition. It, along with ash, is one of the first tree species to occupy a site after cottonwoods. Boxelder can tolerate shade, and once becoming established in a forest, it usually remains as succession advances. However, as more dominant species, such as elm, begin to mature and the site becomes drier, boxelders become fewer in number.

Natural History

Boxelder is considered a tough tree. It will withstand drought conditions longer than most trees. Boxelder will not tolerate flooding for as long as cottonwood and willow.

Life Span: Boxelder is not a long-lived tree. Most die before reaching 100 years in age.

Size: The largest boxelder in the country is in Lenawee County, Michigan. This national champion boxelder is 110 feet

(34 m) tall with a branch spread of 120 feet (37 m). It is 203 inches (516 cm) in circumference. The largest boxelder in South Dakota is not taller than the national champion, but it is larger in circumference. Near Columbia, South Dakota, there is a boxelder that is over 261 inches (663 cm) in circumference, 35 feet (11 m) tall with a branch spread of 60 feet (18 m). It is not uncommon to find boxelders wider than they are tall.

Significance

Because it has a well-earned reputation for being able to grow almost anywhere, boxelder was planted around many early homesteads. It also was used in some early windbreaks. However, because the female boxelder trees attract boxelder bugs, the tree is rarely planted today. Boxelder bugs are harmless, but they like to spend the fall and winter in warm houses.

Boxelder is still used as a source of firewood, the primary use the American Indians had for it. The Omaha, and perhaps other tribes, used the wood to make charcoal for ceremonial painting. The American Indians and early European settlers tapped the boxelder for its sugary sap, much as we do with sugar maple these days. Boxelder produces less sap and it is not as sweet, but still it was one of the few sources of a sweetener on the prairie.

Because of its form and small stature, boxelder has never been an important timber species even on the timber-poor prairie. The wood is soft and splits easily. It also makes poor fence posts since it decays quickly when in contact with the ground.

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