

# MONTEREY NEWS



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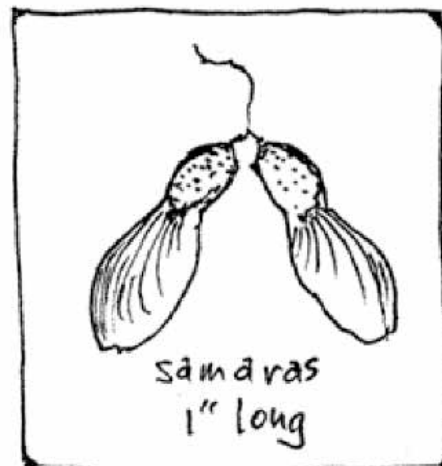
## Striped Maples, Sharing Dominance in the Mixed Mesophytic

Maples are our familiar near neighbors here, and thanks to early farmers there is many a strong and stately row of sugar maples along our town roads. You can come upon them deep in the woods, where once a road ran along a field or pasture. Follow awhile and come to stoneworks, a story of human endeavors and habitation on this hillside, or industry along this stream.

The roads remain, and so do the mighty sugar maples, set up so long ago. Here at our place they were tapped by our ancestor Dad Keyes and by his father too. When we go out to hang buckets on the trees we can see where Dad Keyes came by, three generations back. In fact, we still use some of his good tools, including his hatchet and hoe, also the brace he might have used to tap the sugar maples. We did get our own bit for it, nearly fifty years ago when we started out. We have his long wooden toolbox, but there were no bits the right size for our spiles. Those are the little hollow spouts you hammer into the holes.

When we think "maple" most of us head straight for the sugar maple. But there is many another maple in these woods. One I have liked since childhood, though I never got any sugar out of one, is the striped maple. These have slim smooth trunks, not very big around, and the bark is quite green. In a plant, this means chlorophyll. The bark of the striped maple is described by one writer like this: (He uses another common name for this species.)

"Moosewood is a revelation of interesting bark. On twigs and branches this is semiglossy, exactly the color and texture of a green olive, marked with white lines, as though someone had stroked it with a piece of chalk. This bark is alive, and that fact keeps it satin smooth. Outside bark on most trees is dead, breaks into corky surface when rent by expanding wood, or outer layer of dead skin peels off, as on birches. Moosewood's juicy sugary bark and buds are eaten by deer and moose." (Rutherford Pratt, writing in his book *American Trees*, 1952.)



Maybe some of us remember the Moosewood Restaurant in Ithaca, New York. I never went, but we still have two beat-up cookbooks from that place. It was a collective and one of our friends had a sister who was part of it. None of the great recipes include stripping bark or buds from moosewood trees, but I think you could. Moose and deer do this, also browse on the buds. And farmers in these parts, generations before our Dad Keyes, are said to have fed leaves, both fresh and dried, to their cattle. In the spring they reportedly turned their stock out in the woods to browse on the new buds. Ruffed grouse, also called partridges, eat these buds, too.

Moosewood trees, moose maples, striped maples, do not stand alone. We can consider them alone, notice how their leaves and blossoms are unique, different from those of any of the other species of maples. We can learn the many names of this one species. In Latin it is *Acer pensylvanicum* with just one "n" in the name of the state. Therein hangs a tale, too, of course. This tree is also called goose foot maple, also snakebark maple. Knowing one or more of these names makes it possible to look it up and see what others have noticed or heard about this tree. If you look in a field guide to trees you might find a paragraph or two and a drawing or photo.

If you are lucky, you will find yourself directed to an account of the kind of place such a tree is likely to grow, also the many other things that grow there in an interdependent

community of life and rocks and soil and water. The striped maple is one of several kinds of trees and shrubs that make up what is called the understory in a hardwood forest, thriving in the shade and providing even more shade to the forest floor below. The striped maple contributes to what is called the vertical diversity of the woods, which consists of many layers which give specific food and shelter to certain birds, and certain flowers on the forest floor. Black-throated blue warblers, for instance, prefer nesting sites in a dense understory layer. And down below are certain flowers: mayflower, Indian cucumber, wood sorrel, jack-in-the-pulpit, trillium, partridge berry, and wild sarsaparilla.

Rutherford Platt, that eloquent maple appreciator, wrote, "If you would seek perfection, go look at the maple. It is like truth made into the form of a tree." Any short walk around here to find this perfection will be ecologically so remarkable, you might have to sit down in the face of its complexity, its health and rightness. The great reward of its truth.

— Bonner McAllester