

Acer circinatum (vine maple)

Meaning: *Acer* is a Latin word meaning “sharp” and refers to the pointed leaves of a maple. *Circinatum* is Latin for “circular” referring to the general leaf shape.

Description: Vine maple is deciduous and can be a small tree or shrub, from 1-8 m tall. Its stem/trunk can form long arches and are usually pale green to reddish, becoming brown with age. The leaves are opposite, 3-12 cm wide with 7 to 9 lobes, hairy on the lower surface as well as along the veins on the upper surface. In autumn, the leaves turn gold to bright red, depending on how much sun they receive. It also produces the familiar maple “wings”, 2-4 cm long and reddish-brown in fall.

Habitat: Grows in wet to mesic closed and open forests and streamsides in the lowland and montane zones. *Acer circinatum* is common in southwestern BC (except Bowen Island, where it is not reported except as a garden ornamental), and rare on southern Vancouver Island.

Range: In North America, vine maple is found along the coast, from southwest BC to northern California.

Wildlife notes: During the summer, the leaves are a preferred food of black-tailed deer and elk. The seeds, buds, and flowers provide food for many birds and small mammals. Squirrels and chipmunks eat the seeds, frequently storing them in caches after removing the hull and wing. Birds also use the leaves and seed stalks for nest building.

Other notes: Vine maple is a great survivor of fire. Even when all the leaves, branches and stems are burned up, vine maple can quickly resprout from its root crowns postfire.

First Nations use: The wood was used for a wide variety of things including bows, snowshoes, cradle frames, drum hoops, spoons, dishes, small boxes and many other things. Some peoples burned the wood to charcoal, then mixed it with water and brown sugar to treat ailments such as dysentery and polio.

Gardening use: Vine maple is a terrific choice for native plant gardeners. It is available at many nurseries, or can be grown from seed or cuttings. For more information about propagation, see the sources below.

- *Propagation of Pacific Northwest Native Plants* by Robin Rose et al.
- *USDA Plant Guide* (online) at http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg_acci.pdf



Photo: Kevin DeBoer