Silver maples are some of the first trees to flower in the spring. Although maple trees can be big, their flowers are very small.

Look closely at the branches: do you see the swelling buds? Tiny yellowish flowers will soon emerge, before the leaves. Maple flowers have separate staminate (male) and pistilate (female) flowers. Once you start looking, you’ll see maple buds and flowers all around you in March. Some other common maple flowers are bright red (red and sugar maples) and yellow-green (Norway maple).
After maple flowers are pollinated, their fruit (samaras) develop quickly, and ripen by April or May. A samara consists of a seed attached to a papery wing; they are usually borne in pairs. Because of their unique shape, the samaras spin like helicopters in the wind and can travel a long way.

Silver maples can grow to be very large trees. At one point, the majestic silver maple on Meadow Road was the tallest tree in our collection at 132 feet tall. This centenarian has faced harsh storms and bears the scars to prove it. It suffered damage as a result of Hurricane Irene, in August 2011. Most recently, during a nor’easter in 2018, one of the main branches came down leaving behind a large wound that can be seen from the backside of the tree. If you look up into the canopy you will also see cables that are helping to hold the tree together. Arboretum horticulturists and arborists have been working hard to extend the life of this beloved tree.

Because we are a living museum, curation staff at the Arboretum keep very detailed records on the trees in the collection. Every year, staff members check thousands of plants, tracking growth and monitoring overall health.

There are 11 silver maples in the Arnold Arboretum collections. There are a couple of outliers but most are located in the maple collection (★). If you would like to see our beloved centenarian specimen (★) you won’t need to travel too far. It’s located near the start of Linden Path on Meadow Rd. There is even a weeping variety, can you find it.