

Paperbark Maple

Acer griseum



The living collections of the Arnold Arboretum hold many important trees, but few are as significant as two of its paperbark maples. Not only are these trees exquisitely beautiful, but they are also the largest and oldest specimens of this rare Chinese species growing in North America. They were the original introductions of this highly ornamental species into North America.

The bark of this Chinese species is unique in the maple family. Once the leaves have fallen, the paperbark maple really stands out in the Arboretum's landscape. The attractive bark is reddish bronze to cinnamon brown. Older bark exfoliates (peels) in thin paper sheets, lifting and curling in paper-like sections. Rich shades of smooth, satin textured cinnamon, orange and brown are exposed.

Here is the story of how those two special trees came to be growing in the Arboretum.

One of them is the well-known, low-branched individual growing on Bussey Hill along Chinese Path, the other is much taller and grows at the edge of the maple collection near the Bradley Garden of Rosaceous Plants.

Native only to the central Chinese provinces of Hubei, Sichuan, Honan, and Shensi, this maple was introduced into cultivation by the prolific plant hunter Ernest Henry Wilson and has come to be regarded as possibly the best of his hundreds of plant introductions. He first found the tree in May of 1901, when he jotted in his field notebook “Hupeh’s best maple.” Later, he came to regard it as “China’s best maple”. In the fall of 1907, Wilson collected at least two seedlings of paperbark maple in Hubei Province, China. Later that year, he introduced them to the United States through the Arnold Arboretum. Many plants growing in the United States are decedents of these two specimens.



Here are the two locations for the largest and oldest *Acer griseum* trees in the Arboretum.

Can you find them out in the landscape?