Red maples are some of the first trees to flower in the spring at the Arboretum. Although maple trees can be big, their flowers are very small. Look closely at the branches: do you see the swelling buds? Tiny red flowers will soon emerge, before the leaves.

Maple flowers have separate staminate (male) and pistillate (female) flowers. Once you start looking closely, you’ll see maple buds and flowers all around you. Some other common maple flowers are bright red (sugar maple), yellowish (silver maple) and yellow-green (Norway maple).
After red maple flowers are pollinated, their fruits (samaras) develop quickly, and ripen that same spring. 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.

Red maples are “one of the commonest and most generally distributed trees of eastern North America, ranging between more degrees of latitude than any other American tree” (C.S. Sargent). Their native range is from Newfoundland to Florida and west to Minnesota, Oklahoma and Texas.

Collections Up Close: Magnificent Maples on Sunday, April 21, 1:00–3:00
Explore our world-class maple collection as flowers bloom and new leaves unfurl. Collections Up Close events offer great ways to explore plants at the Arboretum. Take a guided tour, participate in a fun science activity for kids, look under a microscope, and chat with knowledgeable staff and volunteers.

Letterboxing!
Letterboxing is a fun way to explore the Arboretum and find maple trees. For more information on letterboxing, go to www.letterboxing.org. Check out a new letterbox every month—stop by the Hunnewell Building Visitor Center or download a guide online.

To find the letterbox, follow these directions:
• Starting at the Hunnewell Building, walk down Meadow Road to the second trash can on your right. Across the road you will find a silver maple with low-hanging branches; look for the tiny yellow flowers emerging from the red buds.
• Continue along Meadow Road until you reach the Acer mono (painted maple) with a twisted trunk on your left. Go to the back side of the trunk and take 38 steps.
• On your left is a large Acer rubrum (red maple) with accession # 15350-A. Go to to the trunk of this tree and continue 38 more steps to Acer rubrum ‘Armstrong’, a red maple cultivar.
• Turn slightly left, take 15 steps to reach a young red maple, accession # 207-2005-A.
• Turn right and take 20 steps to the large Acer rubrum ‘Columnare’. This is the tree with the letterbox. Search for the box on the ground nestled into the trunk of the tree. Remember to leave everything just as you found it for the next explorers!