

Bigtooth Maples for Boerne – Very NICE!

Bill Ward Boerne Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas

In more ways than one, November is the month of the bigtooth maple in Boerne. For one thing, November usually is the month bigtooth maples show off their spectacular fall colors. In addition, November will be for many years to come the month that bigtooth maples are awarded to various citizens, businesses, organizations, and schools in Boerne.

Thanks to the generosity of the Lende Foundation, the Boerne Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas is sponsoring the Bigtooth Maples for Boerne project. This program is a ten-year endeavor to promote planting bigtooth maples in order to make Boerne a site of spectacular fall color.

Applications for the trees were received in October, and the “Tree Adoption Awards” ceremony will be Saturday, November 4 at the Ag and Heritage Museum at City Park. The festivities will begin with a pancake breakfast at 8 AM. A demonstration on maple planting and care will start at 9 AM. The lucky recipients can pick up their trees between 10 AM and 2 PM. Mulch, wire caging, and stakes will be provided at no charge to ensure the survival of each tree.

It seems appropriate that we are repeating, for the first time, a Plant of the Month for Operation NICE! (Natives Instead of the Common Exotics!). Bigtooth maple (*Acer grandidentatum*) is our NICE! plant for November.

Many local people believe that the nearest wild bigtooth maples grow in Lost Maples State Natural Area along the Sabinal River north of Vanderpool. However, bigtooth maples also grow in other parts of the Edwards Plateau, mostly in canyons of Bandera, Real, Uvalde, and Kendall Counties. In fact, bigtooth maples are growing wild within the Boerne city limits. These trees are found along Cibolo Creek and its tributaries just upstream of Boerne, and a few even grow on Cibolo Creek southeast of Boerne.

Based on fossil pollen and seed studies, big tooth maples, close relatives of the sugar maple, were common on the Edwards Plateau during the last 20,000 years or so, when the climate was cooler and wetter. Over time the general trend in this area has been toward a warmer and drier climate, and the bigtooth maple has decreased in abundance. Today bigtooth maples in the Hill Country mostly are confined to damp limestone canyons with spring-fed streams.

The common name for this maple comes from the species name, *grandidentatum*, which refers to the large teeth or lobes of the leaf margin. The 2- to 5-inch-wide leaves have three to five lobes. During the fall, the leaves turn red, yellow or orange, apparently depending on the genetic makeup of the individual tree. Different trees in the same area may have

different-colored leaves. It is impossible to predict which saplings will grow into trees of a certain-colored fall foliage. Picking out a young tree at a nursery is an unavoidable gamble, but most will give some nice fall colors, whether predominantly yellow, gold, or red.

Besides the Edwards Plateau, bigtooth maples are found at several high-elevation localities in Trans-Pecos Texas and northern Mexico and at a few spots in northern Central Texas in Bell and Coryell Counties. They also grow in the Rocky Mountains.

Baxter Adams, a major grower of bigtooth maples, will present a program to the Boerne Chapter of NPSOT contrasting the health of the bigtooth maple population in the Hill Country with that in the Guadalupe Mountains of far West Texas. The Guadalupe Mountain population has all ages of bigtooth maples, from little sprouts to mature trees. In the Hill Country there are only mature bigtooth maples. Very few, if any, saplings are surviving to replace the old trees.

Why the difference? Please join us for Baxter Adam’s presentation and learn the answer.

The meeting is Tuesday, November 7, beginning at 7PM at the Cibolo Nature Center. Meetings are free and open to the public, and visitors are cordially welcome.