

# They're Changing the Face of Boerne

Guest columnist *Jack Morgan*

Big News: Five years from now, Novembers in Boerne will look dramatically different. The autumn leaves will be far brighter, showing a lot more gold, sometimes orange, and even shades of red. In short, it'll look more like autumn did 100 years ago in these parts, because (drumroll please) Bigtooth Maples are making a comeback!

What are Bigtooth Maples? Well, you've probably seen these beauties at Lost Maples State Park near Vanderpool, but what you may not know is that they're also native to Boerne. Problem is, they've been nearly eradicated here because of deer. The Hill Country is home to several times the number of deer it would support if nature had its way. Those hungry, over-populated deer eat the tasty leaves from the tender young bigtooth maple tree saplings that come up from seed, keeping them from ever getting taller than a foot or two. So in a very few areas around Boerne, Bigtooth Maples have held on, and only then because those are places where the young trees are protected, or deer simply can't get to.

Here's the worst case scenario: the old Bigtooth Maples will

eventually die off, not being replaced, simply disappearing from this part of Texas. Pretty dire possibility, eh? So who's gonna save the Bigtooths from extinction? It's the "they" from the headline – a group called Bigtooth Maples for Boerne (BTMFB). <http://www.npsot.org/Boerne/maplesforboerne>

Started last year, this ad-hoc group is a standing committee of the Boerne Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT), which has committed time, money and considerable effort towards re-establishing bigtooths in Boerne.

Here's NPSOT's innovative plan to re-maple-ize Boerne: • Find people who will commit to water the trees they plant for two years (after 2 years their roots are established, and they can make it on their own). • Find places in and around Boerne to plant them.

It's just that simple. Last year BTMFB found enough volunteers to give homes to about 100 bigtooths, and this fall another 100+ are being added. Scattered all around town, these trees are perhaps easiest spotted on the Old #9 Hike and Bike Path that cuts diagonally across Boerne. Spot the bigtooths at either end of the trail

and at the Depot planting by the Blanco intersection, where several are turning nicely.

"But what about the deer who will eat them?" you're surely asking. BTMFB puts protective fencing around them 'til they're tall enough to be out of those pesky deer's reach.

While the bigtooths aren't too picky, they don't like their roots to be kept too wet. They're good in full sun, but if you have a little afternoon shade, they won't complain. Bigtooths don't need a bag of peat moss to plant (just use the soil you pull out of the hole), nor do they need fertilizing. And most importantly, bigtooths are almost disease and insect-free. This is an ideal tree for the Hill Country. Perhaps for your yard?

This year's crop of bigtooths is nearly planted, but if you'd like to look after a bigtooth or two starting next fall, give the BTMFB folks a call (830 249-8240, speak to Maple Momma). That number can also connect you to the Native Plant Society, which can steer you to the trees and shrubs that will most easily grow here.

Give 'em a call, and maybe you can help change the face of Boerne!