

Sycamore

The Tree

Sycamore belongs to the *Acer* (maple) genus and is not to be confused with the tree that is called sycamore in the US and plane in the UK (*Platanus occidentalis*). Sycamore grows quite quickly and is regarded as a forest weed by some, but its tolerance to pollutants and exposure make it popular as a tree on erosion sites and coastal environments. It is well recognisable by its palmate leaves with 5 lobes (not completely unlike the one on the Canadian flag). You might also remember using maple seeds as helicopters or sticky nose-extensions in childhood days.

Typical diameters up to 1.2 m

Height up to 35 m

Age up to 500 years

8% of UK broadleaved forest

Typical yield class 7

Sycamore maple *Acer pseudoplatanus*



Sycamore
Picture by Muccnord, Wikimedia Commons

The Timber

Sycamore makes a relatively plain timber that has traditionally been used in turned goods and carvings, including “love-spoons” in Wales. The wood has a decorative sheen, especially in the radial section when the rays are cut. It can also have a variety of figures, and flamed as well as striped maple are highly valued in musical instruments. Maple burrs are used in decorative objects. Maple from Germany can also be graded to strength class D30 and used structurally.



Sycamore wood

Pale to yellow or reddish
 Heartwood not clearly demarcated
 Rays lighter than primary wood colour
 High sheen, especially in radial section
 Fine texture
 Diffuse-porous
 Vessels small, mostly solitary
 Rays both narrow and wide
 Parenchyma banded

What do we know about home-grown sycamore?

Strength	Moderately high; comparable to oak
Stiffness	
Density (at 12% mc)	510 kg/m ³
Hardness	Moderate compared to other hardwoods; slightly lower than oak
Machinability	Easy Good for turning, carving Saw burns are common Stains easily during drying
Durability	Not durable

Why is this information so vague?

Little is known about the properties of home-grown hardwoods. Some research was carried out by Lavers, starting in the 1950s and carrying on until 2002, but a limited number of trees was used in this research. Also, the testing was done on small clear specimens, and data for full-sized specimens with defects is rarely available. Nonetheless, we can use this data to compare between species, between timbers from the UK and Europe (or other countries) and between new data and historic results.

References & Further Reading

[The Wood Database](#)

[European Atlas of Forest Tree Species, Sycamore](#)

[Woodland Trust, Sycamore](#)

[Cotton, Scottish Furniture Woods](#)

Lavers, 2002, The Strength Properties of Timber