

Vine Maple by Kathleen Sayce

Vine maple is a tiny cousin to Big-leaf Maple. These are much smaller trees—in a coastal rainforest they are understory trees, growing in light gaps underneath the huge conifers that dominate the canopy. Local tribes used small stems for basket weaving, fish weirs, tools, salmon tongs, and had many other uses its supple stems.

Vine Maple starts life as a single stemmed tree, but as it grows, it easily puts up additional stems, taking on a shrubby, multi-stemmed appearance by the time it is a century old. It grows from lowland river banks and damp soils to steep slopes in the Coast Range, and often forms dense thickets of small trunks. If burned or cut down, it re-sprouts from the base.

Spring flowers are bright red, a showy contrast to the fresh light green leaves as they emerge. In late summer to early fall, Vine Maple's glory appears—brilliant red fall leaves. Drought can bring this color change on early, sometimes as early as August.

Maples do well along the coast with a half day of shade, ample soil carbon—think mulches, humus and compost—and regular summer water until they are well established. Do keep them from salt spray along the ocean; no maple likes salt on its leaves.