Bigtooth Maples Care Instructions

Bigtooth Maples (*Acer grandidentatum*) are a must for our local landscape. They are found naturally in the canyons of western Kendall County. These trees are virtually disease and pest resistant. With proper planting and care they will grow 3 to 4 feet per year once established, and live for hundreds of years.

**Consider Before Planting:**

1. **Safety** – “Call Before You Dig” at 811 is a free service and required by law to ensure planting site does not affect utility cables and pipes.

2. **Season** – September through early April is the best time to plant, with December being ideal as tree becomes dormant. Trees planted in the late fall or very early spring can get a head start on establishing their root system and better support their top growth before the grueling summer comes. High temperatures can injure young transplanted trees with their small feeder roots. The roots will continue to grow during the dormant period.

3. **Sunlight** - plant in full sun to part shade, preferably with protection from strong afternoon sun.

4. **Location** - planting in well drained soil is crucial to the health of tree. Bigtooth maples adapt well to most planting sites and all soil types in the Hill Country. This includes thin, alkaline rocky soils as long as there is good drainage. Test planting site by pouring water into planting hole and watch to see if water drains within 4 hours. Planting on a slope works best because water runs off and away from tree. Heavy clay soils in low lying areas with poor drainage can smother the roots.

5. **Overhead power lines** - avoid planting tree under utility lines. This will reduce the need to trim tree. Pruning less is best; newly planted trees need all the leaves they can get to feed roots.

6. **Spacing** – plant 15-20 feet away from other structures making sure the tree has room to grow. Its mature size is 30-45 feet tall. This tree is ideal for street planting because of its upright growth.

7. **Deer Protection:** plant in an enclosed area or cage with wire fence.

**Things to Do When Planting:**

1. **Planting width** – needs to be two to five times wider than the root ball, but no deeper. Wider holes encourage rapid root growth. When using a shovel to dig a hole, be sure that soil is loosened or scored all around the walls of the hole so that glazing does not occur. Glazing prevents roots and water from penetrating into the surrounding soil.

2. **Planting depth** – needs to be no deeper than that root ball. Determine the proper planting depth by measuring the distance from the bottom of the root ball to 2” just below the root collar. It is better for the root ball to be 1”- 2” above the level of the surrounding ground than any measurement below. The worst mistake is to dig a very deep hole, refill it with soft topsoil before placing the tree in hole. In time, the soil will compact and the tree will sink below grade; water will then accumulate around the trunk of tree, bark will rot and the tree will die.

3. **Protect** - by removing all the tags, ribbons, and grow pot/grow-bag. If material is left on, it can girdle the tree. To avoid root damage, don't drag or lift the tree by the trunk. Place tree next to hole.

   **If the tree is in a pot**, lay the pot on its side and gently roll it to loosen the plant from the pot.

   **If the tree is in a grow-bag**, cut the bottom of the grow bag first using a sharp knife/scissors and remove the bottom of grow bag as you gently guide the tree into the planting hole, careful to always protect the root ball by keeping it intact. Once the tree is upright and placed correctly, the remaining side of the grow-bag can be cut and removed.

   If tree appears root bound, gently loosen exterior roots, but DO NOT break the soil from the roots.

4. **Placement** – root ball should sit on soil that is compact. Carefully remove any loose soil from the top of the root ball and be sure root collar is exposed. Check to see that the root ball is either level with or 1” to 2” above finished grade.
5. **Refill hole** – use the original soil to backfill hole around root ball but **not** on top of the root ball. Adding anything, like organic matter to the soil in the hole can be counter productive because any organic matter that is not completely decayed will rob the plant of nitrogen and stunt its growth. Chemical fertilizer can burn the tiny feeder roots. Mild root growth stimulators are acceptable if used as directed but are not necessary.

6. **Do not tamp** – compacting soil to remove air pockets can damage roots. Watering is preferable.

7. **Water thoroughly** to settle the soil and eliminate air pockets around root ball. Repeat deep watering in a couple of days.

**Things to Do After Planting:**

1. **Mulch** - apply 2”- 4” of mulch or a thin 1”- 2” layer of compost over and beyond the root zone. **DO NOT ALLOW MULCH OR COMPOST TO TOUCH TREE TRUNK.** Gently pull mulch 3”- 6” away from base of tree to allow sufficient oxygen exchange.

2. **Deep water** – the tree every 7-10 days through spring, summer and fall of the first year. Reduce water during fall and winter. In a “normal” year, no watering may be necessary in fall and winter, but during a dry period, monthly watering even in winter is desirable. If ½” to 1” of rain has fallen, then wait about 2 weeks to water again. **DO NOT OVER WATER!** Watering the root ball and surrounding soil is crucial during the first two years in order for the tree to establish a deep root system. It is best to let the hose drip slowly at the base of the plant for half a day, or overnight. After two years this tree should be drought tolerant and survive on its own. For areas you cannot reach with the hose, use a five-gallon bucket with a couple of small (1/16” or 1/32”) holes drilled in the bottom of it. This allows five gallons of water to be dripped very slowly to the exact place desired with no runoff.

3. **Add deer protection** - construct a wire cage to prevent deer browsing foliage or rubbing their horns against tree trunk. A 12-foot-long, 4-foot-high, 2”x4”, 14-guage, welded wire cage is recommended. Use garden stakes to secure cage to ground. After tree is above browse line, a smaller cage (chimney) can be fitted loosely around trunk. Remove cage only when deer avoid rubbing it.

4. **Protect bark** - from weed-trimmer damage and lawnmower. The bark of maple trees is very thin and damages more easily than many other trees. Weeding by hand is necessary around base of tree. Grasses and other plants compete with maples, so keeping all vegetation away from the base and beyond the drip line will increase the growth rate of the maple tree.

5. **Prune** only if necessary and less is better. Newly planted trees need all the leaves they can get to feed and establish a good root system. Remove no more than 30% and only dead, broken, diseased or rubbing branches.

6. **Fertilize in mid-March** – applying below drip line using a **natural light organic fertilizer** to the feeder roots, located under the outer edges of the branches. **DO NOT APPLY NEAR THE TREE TRUNK!** For newly planted tree, you know exactly where the feeder roots are – they are at the edge of the old root ball. To coax feeder roots to grow outward, apply organic fertilizer a few inches outside of the root zone. Natural/organic fertilizers are complete fertilizers, supplying not only nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P) and potassium (K) but also micro nutrients to the plant. Apply on top of mulch and over and slightly beyond the root zone. **Do NOT apply synthetic/chemical fertilizer as this can burn tender roots.** There is no danger of burning tree roots when an **organic** fertilizer is applied. The only deficiency that our soils have is nitrogen which is required to stimulate growth. Good fertilizers are those with a 3-2-2 ratio such as “Texas Tee”. **Do NOT use a balanced fertilizer (15-15-15) because it adds too much phosphorus which is already adequate in our soil.**

*The Boerne Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas meets at 7:00 PM, the first Tuesday of each month, September through June at the Cibolo Nature Center. Meetings are free and open to the public. Visit our website [www.npsot.org/boerne](http://www.npsot.org/boerne) to find more recommended plants for the Boerne area.*