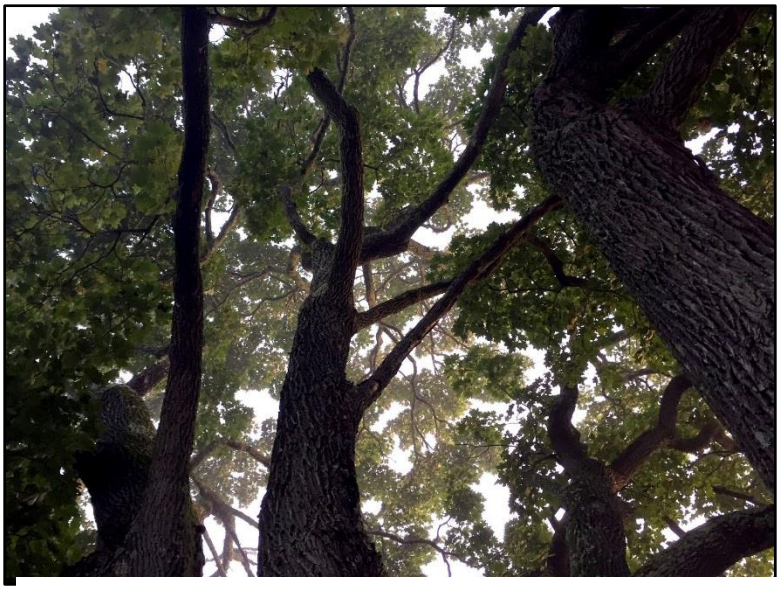
You Ain't From Around Here! Exotic Invasive of the Quarter: Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*)

By Jennifer Gagnon, Virginia Tech

I've decided to feature Norway maple as the exotic invasive of the quarter as an ode to the lovely, albeit invasive, individual that dominates my front yard. You can see a photo of it here: http://bigtree.cnre.vt.edu/detail.cfm?AutofieldforPrimaryKey=1903 because it is the fourth-largest Norway maple in Virginia. Being a nerdy forester, this is something that brings me great pride. I'm not ashamed of it being an exotic invasive as I was not the one to plant it over 100 years ago. This article is a tribute to it, because it is not long for this world. In the past year, I've seen significant decline – a thinning crown, sloughing bark, fungal bodies at the base, and a large crack along one of the main stems. The wind is wicked out at my place and the tree hangs over my roof. Not a safe combination for a tree in this condition. As such, my husband and I have regretfully come to the decision to take it down this fall. This will completely change the character of the yard, reduce shading of the house, and make me very sad. On the upside, it will reduce seed production from an exotic invasive species.



A thinning crown may be a sign of decline. Photo by: Jennifer Gagnon, Virginia Tech.

Native to Europe (from Norway south) and western Asia, Norway maple was first introduced to the United States by John Bartram in 1746. The dense, rounded crown, ease of transplanting, rapid growth rate, resistance to damage from wind and ice, and tolerance of a wide range of soils, pollution, and temperatures quickly made it popular as a street tree in urban areas.

You may be asking yourself, if it's such a tough, lovely tree, what's the problem? Norway maple produces copious amounts of seeds, forms dense canopies, shades out native species such as sugar maple, and reduces wildflower diversity. Additionally, the surface roots are shallow, leading to damage to lawns and pavement.

Norway maple long ago escaped its urban plantings and now has become a component of eastern forests. In fact, it can be found as a component of early and late successional forests, forested wetlands, open disturbed areas, roadsides, vacant lots, yards, and gardens. In Virginia however, Norway maple isn't the worst of the worst when it comes to invasive species. Virginia's Department of Conservation and Recreation's Division of Natural Heritage only has it ranked as a medium invasive threat. But in northern states, such as New York, it can be more problematic.

How to identify Norway maple:

Form: Broad, deciduous trees, typically 40-60' tall, up to 100', rounded crown.
Bark: Smooth when young, turns dark and furrowed with age.
Leaves: Opposite, dark green, palmately veined, marginal teeth, long hair-like tips, 5-7 lobes, 4-7" wide.

Sloughing bark on its own may not be a sign of decline, but if there are other symptoms, such as a thinning crown and fungal growth at the base, yard trees should be examined by a qualified arborist. Photo by: Jennifer Gagnon, Virginia Tech.

Flowers: April -May, bright green-yellow, in upright round clusters. Showy when tree is in full bloom.
Fruits: Two-winged samaras, 1 – 1.5" long, in clusters, green when young, turning yellow, then brown. Mature in late summer,
persist into winter, wind dispersed. Mature earlier than seeds from other species of maple.
An easy way to distinguish Norway maple from other maples is the milky sap that oozes out of the leaf veins.

How to control Norway maple:

Mechanical: Pull small seedlings when soil is moist. Dig out root systems of larger seedlings/saplings. Cut down large trees and apply herbicide to stump to prevent sprouting or girdle trees.
Chemical: Cut stump treatment with glyphosate; or cut stump or basal bark treatment with triclopyr.

Soon my woodland shade garden will be no more. The male hummingbird will no longer have a perch from which to guard the feeders on our porch from the female who is unrelenting in her attempts to feed from them. On the plus side, there will be enough firewood

to heat our home for the next several winters. The Norway maple will be replaced with a white oak seedling grown from an acorn collected from Virginia Tech's Stadium woods. Hopefully this native tree will one day grow up to be a state champion contender. And I am perfectly comfortable letting the owners 300 years from now deal with its imminent decline.

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