



## Backyard Wisdom • February 2016

*by: Gilbert A Smith, ISA Master Arborist*

*We do a lot of talking about what is good for trees, but frankly we're just people who can't think like a tree. So I thought this year I would ask some of my favorite trees to speak for themselves. If you have questions you would like to ask a tree please send them to Gil Smith at the Arborsmiths, and he will go talk to his friends the trees.*

### Interview with a Sugar Maple

**Gil** - Allow me to introduce one of my very favorite trees, this is Ms. Sugar Maple a.k.a. *Acer saccharum*. She's about 120 years old and lives in Daniel Wright Forest Preserve in Lake County Illinois. So tell us Ms. Maple, you must be pretty healthy in order to live so long. How do you do it?



*Sugar Maple in beautiful fall color*

**Ms Maple** - Well I eat right, get plenty of exercise when the wind blows through my branches, I don't smoke, and I try to stay away from the junk food. *Just kidding*, really I'm not so old for my species. Many of us Maples in the forest preserve here could live to be 500 years old. You see we trees are tribal. That means we are most healthy when we grow in and around all of our friends in the forest. All of the young saplings around me are saying "duhh!"

**Gil** - I have to ask for the sake of my human readers, many of whom like to plant Maples in their yard, what's the difference between a front yard and the forest?

**Ms Maple** - People can't see the difference because it is mostly under ground. You see, *our roots do not go down deep into the soil* as most human books depict. Our roots stay close to the surface where there is air to breathe, loose soil to grow in, minerals to keep us healthy, worms,



*Ms Sugar Maple; Photos by Lesley Bruce Smith*





ants, fungus and bacteria that break down leaves and twigs so that we can use them to build healthy branches. If you will notice *in the forest there are no green lawns*. Healthy grass roots out compete our tree roots forcing us to survive with half the roots we need to keep us healthy. Your own Morton Arboretum researched this. You humans have written all this down and I hear you can find it on the internet.

**Gil** - I'm sorry Ms Maple. I'm wondering how we keep our trees healthy like you and plant them in our yards?

**Ms Maple** - That's simple. Just put mulch under our branch spread. Plant trees and shrubs in groups and segregate the lawn from the trees as they do at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Even my seedlings know this stuff, it's easy, and *the most important treatment you can do for your trees!*

**Gil** - Thanks Ms Maple for taking the time to talk. I've included a couple of pictures from our clients who have successfully integrated trees into their suburban landscapes.

