

Hughie Jones - November 2021

*Velvet Maple (Acer velutinum)*

VanDusen has only one velvet maple or Persian maple (*Acer velutinum*). It is probably pining for its native home - a relict forest that goes back to the late Tertiary, 25 - 50 million years ago. This ancient forest, called the Hyrcanian, is a moist, mixed deciduous forest that still exists today. It became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2019.

The forest is mostly in the mountains of northern Iran but also extends into Azerbaijan and Georgia. Before glaciation started two and a half million years ago, this deciduous forest was much more widespread. Within the relict forest today, velvet maple lives in moist, deep soils on hillsides and in ravines and is found up to 1800 m above sea level. It can grow as a single tree or in small clusters alongside other tree species.

Fertile soil, precipitation, and temperate climate cause velvet maple and the other trees it grows with - oriental beech (*Fagus orientalis*), chestnut-leaved oak (*Quercus castaneifolia*), and black alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) - to reach 50 m in height and a diameter of 3 m at breast height. Hyrcanian forest trees are host to many epiphytes such as mosses, ferns, lichens, and mistletoes. And its soils are rich in minerals and organic matter.

The velvet maple has a record leaf size, with only our northwestern native big-leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*) exceeding it. I saw gigantic old growth big-leaf maples at the Hoh Rainforest in Olympic Peninsula National Park - old man's beard was hanging from them, fern beds growing on them, and their branches thick with moss. I am sure our one velvet maple is dreaming of its relict deciduous forest.

The soft short hair (pubescent) on the underside of this maple leaf feels like velvet. I chose this tree in the Maple Collection sight unseen only because of its common name. Velvet fits November and winter is coming. You can visit it in bed 115. It was planted there in 1985.



*Velvet maple in VanDusen in November*

(*Acer velutinum* - leaves 5-lobed, 15-25 cm across, glaucous beneath or with a yellow-brown tomentum along the nerves, bases almost cordate, lobes ovate; margins coarsely serrate to lobulate; petioles 10-25 cm long. It is one of the largest maples; very few species grow faster or taller. It grows to a huge tree of 50 m tall with large leaves, surpassed in size only by *Acer macrophyllum*.)

For more information on velvet maple:

<http://treesandshrubsonline.org/articles/acer/acer-velutinum>

<https://forums.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/threads/acer-velutinum.15151/>