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Mature sugar maple tree.
Photo: S. Weeks, Trees of Indiana [CD-FNR-1]

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Sugar Maple in No-Till Fields

No-till fields sometimes have problems with perennial weeds like common pokeweed, Johnsongrass, and on occasion tree species. One species that we have noticed in several no-till fields over the past couple of years is sugar maple (*Acer saccharum* Marsh [Figure 1]) seedlings.

The sugar maple is a native of Eastern US that has been planted as an ornamental in many yards and along roads. Its fame comes from using its sap for maple syrup, but it has also been used for its wood. For Canadians it is significant in the fact that it is a major component of the Canadian flag. It grows to be a large tree of 100 to 150 ft tall with a trunk diameter up to 2.5 to 3.5 ft. It has a typical maple leaf 3 to 6 inches long with 3 to 7 lobes (Figure 2). Leaves are generally dark green on the top and light green on the underside. Sugar maples flower in April to May. Their flowers are greenish yellow and droop on hairy pedicels. Even at a small size the seedling will show the typical leaf shape.

Although these are beautiful trees they are generally not welcome in a soybean or corn field. If allowed to persist they become more troublesome to control in a row crop field. The papery wings of the seed can carry seed over 300 feet from the parent tree, easily across a road or into your field. Seedlings can germinate and do well in either shade or full light, emerging in April and May. When seedlings emerge, much of the season's growth occurs with 24 days of emergence.

Information for the control of sugar maple tends to revolve the control of the small or large trees in a forestry setting. When doing a search of labeled products in corn or soybean, generally only glyphosate products appeared to be labeled to control sugar maple. The recommendations on most labels refer to a spot treatment when at least 50 percent of the leaves are present. These applications are applied using a 0.75 to 1.5 (rates vary depending on label) percent solution and a hand held back pack sprayer. Some dicamba (Banvel) labels address cut surface and stump applications for the control of maples and Clarity's label has maple as a control species. However, information to the specific control of sugar maple seedlings in corn or soybean was not fully addressed. Considering the above mentioned products do have activity on larger mature trees, we suspect that both glyphosate (Roundup) and dicamba (Banvel, Clarity, Distinct products) are effective on sugar maple seedlings, but one thing is for sure, the topic is definitely open for some investigation. Our recommendations would be to use the highest allowable rates of these products in the burndown or postemergence in the crop. If they are established in a long-term no-till field, consider aggressive tillage of the specific area where the trees are growing or fall mowing and cut stump treatments if tillage is not desirable.



Mature sugar maple tree leaves.
Photo: S. Weeks, Trees of Indiana [CD-FNR-1]

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