

Maple Trees *Forever*

Transplanting these tiny saplings was a sweaty, frustrating but ultimately satisfying labour of love

by *Gloria Lauris, Ottawa*



Clockwise from above: Young maple leaves; three maple saplings; maple leaves in summer; mushrooms on Gloria's lawn.

Knee-deep in leaf mulch and surrounded by blood-crazed mosquitoes, I was waving them off with bizarre sign language. My friend Allan had agreed to come along to help. He was muttering under his breath, aggressively digging up a spindly maple tree from its forest home. This was no easy task, since roots and rocks sprung up everywhere. You had to be careful not to trip over fallen logs or twist an ankle in sunken debris and thatch. Clearly, things were not going as planned. Having long-admired these trees, I planned to get a Canadian red or sugar maple for my Ottawa front yard from the local garden nursery. However, the offer of free local maple trees from my friend Dave's cottage-land outside of town was too attractive to pass up; we just had to dig them up ourselves on his acreage. How

hard could that be? Dense overgrowth made finding maple trees challenging, and the few we found were thin and scrawny. Roots were often intertwined. Stopping and grunting, Allan drove the shovel next to a young maple tree and worked his way around it, dodging the whipping of the spindly branches in his face as the trunk shook during excavation. It was eventually unceremoniously uprooted. "Good job!" I said enthusiastically, shoving its gnarly roots into a black garbage bag.

Sizing up another potential victim, Allan used a pitchfork and thrust it into the soil around the small tree's roots, pushing the handle down. The tree roots pushed back. Allan pushed down harder. CRACK! The handle of the large fork split. The small but defiant tree remained rooted—victorious. "Aargh!" A jump, a slap, and then blood trickled down Allan's leg. Who would have thought looking for and digging up maples was so dangerous? These digging actions were repeated on a couple of different trees, with modest success and waning enthusiasm. We made a run for the road, a swarm of demon bugs following us, likely incited by the scent of fresh blood, sweat and fear.

We trudged back to the car with our hard-earned treasures: three maple saplings with roots mostly intact, bunched together in a bag with a few handfuls of leaves and dirt. Cottager Dave chuckled, "So, how was the forest bathing?" We grunted, dispirited. Dave pressed on, nonchalantly. "The black flies are pretty bad this time of year."

Allan spoke up: "But the snakes are even worse," displaying the wound on his calf reminiscent of a snake bite—two red holes close to each other.

Dave glanced at the sore: "Black flies."

"Nope. Snake bite," retorted Allan, disbelieving a mere fly could leave such a hole. (He continues to insist on that story to this day.)

The next day, we carefully lowered the trees into their new home, a freshly dug hole, intertwining the three unrelated saplings together like siblings, covering their roots with rich soil and watering them thoroughly. Over the next few days, I saw the