

KISSING MAPLES

43.5106 N, 72.1329 W

This red maple (*Acer rubrum*) began life as two separate saplings, but they were too close together. Probably one of the trees tried to start a branch growing in the direction of its neighbor, but as the branch grew it began to rub against the neighbor. Once the bark was worn away, the growth layers of the wood, a part called the cambium, came into contact and merged. Now the two trunks are bound together in a long kiss.

The ability of closely related species of plants to merge like this makes it possible for growers to graft plants together. When you see an apple tree on sale that can bear several different kinds of apple, it may be because someone took a branch from a Golden Delicious and another branch from a Cortland and grafted them onto the root stock of yet another species, maybe a McIntosh.