

Skunkbush or Lemonade Sumac



Skunkbush or Lemonade Sumac (*Rhus trilobata*)

General Description

Native to the Northern Plains. Spreading shrub, smaller and finer-textured leaves than Fragrant Sumac. Forms a dense mass of stems and leaves. Scented leaves and light yellow flowers.

Leaves and Buds

Bud Arrangement - Alternate.

Bud Color - Yellow, pubescent, covered by leaf scar.

Bud Size - Small.

Leaf Type and Shape - Trifoliate.

Leaf Margins - Acute to acuminate, crenate-serrate.

Leaf Surface - Nearly glabrous.

Leaf Length - 1 to 2½ inches; leaflets ¾ to 1¼ inches.

Leaf Width - 1 to 2½ inches; leaflets ½ to ¾ inch.

Leaf Color - Soft green as leaflets unfold, then turning a deep blue-green in summer, and commonly yellow in autumn.

Flowers and Fruits

Flower Type - Polygamous or dioecious, male catkins ½ to 1 inch long, female produces short panicles at the ends of branches.

Flower Color - Greenish-yellow.

Fruit Type - Hairy drupe, ¼ inch in diameter, females only.

Fruit Color - Red.

Form

Growth Habit - Ascending, new branchlets hairy.

Texture - Medium-fine, summer; medium, winter.

Crown Height - 3 to 8 feet.

Crown Width - 4 to 10 feet.

Bark Color - Slightly pubescent, aromatically fragrant when bruised; leaf scars circular, distinctly raised.

Root System - Fibrous, spreading.

Environmental Requirements

Soils

Soil Texture - Adapted to a variety of soils.

Soil pH - 5.5 to 8.0.

Windbreak Suitability Group - 1, 3, 4, 4C, 5, 6D, 6G, 8, 9C, 9L.

Cold Hardiness

USDA Zone 3.

Water

Moderately drought tolerant. Survives harsh growing conditions of North Dakota Badlands.

Light

Full sun, to partial (1/2 to 3/4) shade.

Uses

Conservation/Windbreaks

Small to medium shrub for farmstead windbreaks and riparian plantings.

Wildlife

Important fall and winter food for songbirds and emergency winter food for game birds. Excellent roosting and loafing ground cover. Preferred nesting site for birds.

Agroforestry Products

Wood - Slender branches are split for weaving baskets.

Food - Drupes used for fresh drink.

Medicinal - Used as an astringent, aromatic, mouthwash, and diuretic.

Urban/Recreational

Massing, naturalizing. Fast cover for bank stabilization. Duller foliage than *R. aromatica*.

Cultivated Varieties

Bighorn Sumac (*R. trilobata* 'Bighorn') - Released by USDA-NRCS, Plant Materials Center, Los Lunas, New Mexico, as a cultivar seed strain.

Related Species

Fragrant Sumac (*Rhus aromatica*)

Pests

No major pest problems.

Sumac (skunkbush)

Rhus trilobata



Growth Form: irregular

Crown Density: dense

Size: to 4 feet high

to 8 foot spread

Drought Resistance: excellent

Cold Hardiness: excellent

Growth Rate: rapid to moderate

Life Span: moderate

Elevational Range: to 8,000 feet

Soil Conditions: excellent alkaline tolerance

Possible Insect Problems: fairly resistant

Possible Disease Problems: Fusarium wilt

Wildlife Value: excellent: many birds

Seasonal Color: red-orange fall foliage

Miscellany: native; berries have slight lemon taste when rolled under tongue

Taken from: Trees for Conservation, a buyer's guide, Colorado State Forest Service