

Staghorn Sumac



Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina*)

General Description

A large, loose, open-spreading shrub with a flattish crown and rather picturesque branches resembling the velvety antlers of a deer, hence the name Staghorn. Borderline hardiness, may regularly freeze back in winter.

Leaves and Buds

Bud Arrangement - Alternate.

Bud Color - Gray-brown.

Bud Size - Small, hairy, leaf scars not elevated and somewhat "C" shaped.

Leaf Type and Shape - Pinnately-compound, 11 to 27 leaflets per leaf.

Leaf Margins - Leaflets are acuminate, serrate.

Leaf Surface - Very pubescent or velvet-like when young, including petiole and rachis, glaucous beneath.

Leaf Length - 1 to 1½ feet; leaflets 2 to 4½ inches long.

Leaf Width - 4 to 9 inches; leaflets 1 to 1½ inches.

Leaf Color - Medium green, orange to red autumn color.

Flowers and Fruits

Flower Type - Dioecious, borne in dense, hairy 6 to 12 inch panicles.

Flower Color - Greenish-yellow.

Fruit Type - Densely hairy drupes packed in a pyramidal cluster.

Fruit Color - Red or crimson.

Form

Growth Habit - Upright, stout, branching, umbrella-like canopy.

Texture - Coarse, summer; coarse, winter.

Crown Height - 10 to 15 feet.

Crown Width - 10 to 20 feet.

Bark Color - Branches velvety and hairy concealing the lenticels, larger stems develop rough darkened bark.

Root System - Fibrous, spreading.

Environmental Requirements

Soils

Soil Texture - Adapted to a variety of soil types.

Soil pH - 4.5 to 7.5, but prefers acidic soils.

Windbreak Suitability Group - 1, 3, 4, 4C, 5.

Cold Hardiness

USDA Zone 3. However, stem dieback often occurs.

Water

Slightly less drought tolerant than Smooth Sumac.

Light

Full sun, to partial shade.

Uses

Conservation/Windbreaks

Medium or large shrub for farmstead windbreaks and riparian plantings.

Wildlife

Excellent escape and nesting ground cover.

Agroforestry Products

Wood - Roots and inner bark used as a dye.

Food - Sumac lemonade made from berries.

Medicinal - Some *Rhus* species are used as tea for internal disorders, mouthwash, and constipation.

Urban/Recreational

Massing, naturalizing. Fast cover for bank stabilization.

Cutleaf cultivars are most ornamental for landscaping.

Cultivated Varieties

Shredleaf Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina* 'Dissecta') - Finer-textured, lacy, fern-like leaves.

Cutleaf Staghorn Sumac (*R. typhina* 'Laciniata') - Similar to above.

Related Species

Smooth Sumac (*Rhus glabra*)

Pests

No major pest problems.

STAGHORN SUMAC

Rhus hirta (L.) Sudworth

Plant Symbol = RHHI2

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Northeast Plant
Materials Program



Britton & Brown 1913
Courtesy of Kentucky Native Plant Society
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Alternate Names

Rhus typhina L.

Uses

Sumac serves primarily as a winter emergency food for wildlife. Ring-necked pheasant, bobwhite quail, wild turkey, and about 300 species of songbirds include sumac fruit in their diet. It is also known to be important only in the winter diets of ruffed grouse and the sharp-tailed grouse. Fox squirrels and cottontail rabbits eat sumac bark. White-tail deer like the fruit and stems.

Sumac also makes good ornamental plantings and hedges because of the brilliant red fall foliage. It is best used on drastically disturbed sites where pioneer species are desirable.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Weediness

This plant may become weedy or invasive in some regions or habitats and may displace desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Please consult with your local NRCS Field Office, Cooperative Extension Service office, or state natural resource or agriculture department regarding its status and use. Weed information is also available from the PLANTS Web site at plants.usda.gov.

Description

Anacardiaceae Family: Staghorn sumac is a U.S. native, deciduous, large shrub to small tree that can attain a height of 30-35 feet. It has alternate, compound leaves, 16 to 24 inches long. The leaflets are narrowed or rounded at the base and sharply pointed at the tip with finely serrated edges. The leaflets are dark green and smooth above, and pale beneath, except along the midrib. Compact clusters of greenish-yellow flowers bloom from June to July. Fruits mature from August to September. The fruiting head is a compact cluster of round, red, hairy fruits called drupes. Each drupe measures ¼ inch in diameter and contains one seed. Each cluster of drupes may contain 100 to 700 seeds. Fruit is produced on plants 3 to 4 years old. Because most populations of sumac have male and female flowers on separate plants, only the female plants produce seed. Occasionally, plants are found which have both male and female flowers. The germination of sumac seeds is enhanced by their passage through the digestive system of rabbits, ring-necked pheasants, and quail. The presence of fire also encourages increased germination. There are about 60,000 seeds per pound.

Adaptation and Distribution

Staghorn sumac is found throughout the eastern half of the United States. It generally prefers fertile, upland sites but tolerates a wide variety of conditions. Sumac is tolerant of slightly acid soil conditions and textures ranging from coarse to fine. Typical growing sites include open fields and roadsides, fence rows, railroad rights-of-way, and burned areas.

Sumac is not highly shade tolerate and are considered early successional species.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

One year old nursery grown seedlings are normally used for planting large areas. Once established, stands will spread from the root sprouts. The lateral root system is extensive and spread outward three or more feet a year. This sprouting is encouraged by cutting or fire injury. The colonies appear to lose vigor in about 15 years.

Management

Sumac stands can best be maintained by eliminating competing vegetation by mowing, chemicals, or fire. Sumacs fail to compete with invading tree species and are seldom found growing under a closed canopy.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

No known varieties of these plants exist. Rooted plants may be available from specialty nurseries.

Control

Please contact your local agricultural extension specialist or county weed specialist to learn what works best in your area and how to use it safely. Always read label and safety instructions for each control method. Trade names and control measures appear in this document only to provide specific information. USDA, NRCS does not guarantee or warranty the products and control methods named, and other products may be equally effective.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:

USDA NRCS Northeast Plant Materials Program

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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