



Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)

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Summary:

Foliage: Deciduous broadleaf

Height: 50 feet

Spread: 30 feet

Shape: Pyramidal in youth, round to oval at maturity Sweetgum is a medium/large tree with very showy fall foliage colors. It tolerates moist to dry soils. A notable disadvantage is the mess created by the fallen spiny fruit (gum balls).

Plant Needs:

Zone: 5 to 9

Light: Partial shade to full sun

Moisture: Wet to moist to dry

Soil Type: Sandy, loam or clay

pH Range: 3.7 to 6.8

Functions:

Suggested uses for this plant include shade, street tree, and specimen plant.

Planting Notes:

Slow to establish due its fleshy root system.

Plant trees with balled and burlapped roots in the spring.

Plant in sunny location with moist, slightly acidic soil.

Not tolerant of pollution or areas where root systems do not have ample room to spread.

Care:

Prune during winter, if needed.

Spiny, ball-shaped fruit creates a significant litter problem which is a nuisance in many landscape situations.

Problems:

Iron chlorosis is a problem in soils with a high pH (> 7.0). Scale insects are the most common insect pests.

Alternatives:

Consult local garden centers, historic or public gardens and arboreta regarding cultivars and related species that grow well in your area.

Cultivars of *Liquidambar styraciflua*:

`Burgundy' has purplish leaves in fall.

`Festival' is narrow and upright and has yellow, red, and orange fall color.

`Autumn Glow' has a consistent red to purple fall color.

'Rotundiloba' is fruitless form that has rounded lobes (not pointed like the species). It may occasionally revert to the species, if so, prune out branches with pointed leaves (reversions).

Comments:

Sweetgum is a sight to behold in the fall due to its orange, yellow, and purple foliage colors. An additional ornamental feature is the winged or corky bark projections that develop along the branches. The spiny messy fruit preclude this tree from being used in many home landscape areas. This species tolerates a range of soil moisture conditions. The sweet taste and gummy feel of the sap are the origin of its common name.

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