

Garden Sumacs

Rhus spp.

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There are several species of sumacs (*Rhus* spp.) which deserve to be used in gardens/landscapes. Sumacs are primarily prized for their no-less-than spectacular fall foliage color. Additionally, their red fruits, tropical-looking foliage, and tolerance of adverse conditions are also noteworthy aspects. However, due to their size and ability to spread via suckers, proper placement is necessary. The most prevalent species in the trade is staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*) but there are a few others species that should be considered.

Staghorn Sumac

Rhus typhina

Summary:

Foliage: Large pinnately compound leaves; deciduous

Height: 15 to 25 feet

Spread: Due to suckering habit (shoots emerging from root system), colonies of stems can span 40 + feet

Shape: Individual plants appear as large multi-stem shrubs or small trees.

Main features: This fast-growing suckering large shrub/small tree species has a spectacular foliage color (shades of orange-red) in early autumn. Female plants have showy conical red fruit clusters that persist into the winter. In the deciduous state, plants have a coarse texture due to their thick stems. This species is especially tolerant of adverse soil (all except wet).

This species often suckers (shoots coming off roots) to form large colonies of plants. There are several cultivars (to be discussed) that offer variations in leaf form and leaf color.

Plant Needs:

Zone: 4 to 8

Light: Full sun to part shade

Moisture: Moist to dry

Soil type: Any type, will survive in very poor soil conditions except wet

pH range: Acid to alkaline

Functions:

Due to its suckering habit, staghorn sumac functions as an ornamental large shrub/small tree species in border areas where it can spread without impacting other plantings or living spaces.

Care:

No special care is needed since this species is quite tolerant of adverse conditions. Pruning is required if unwanted suckers spread into adjacent areas.

Additional Information:

The common name, staghorn sumac,, is derived from the densely hairy stems which mimic the velvety antlers of a male deer. There are a few cultivars which offer variations in foliage characteristics. 'Dissecta' and 'Lacianata' have deeply divided leaflets which give the plant a much finer texture than the species; both cultivars are female. The newly emerging foliage of Tiger Eyes® is a dramatic yellow color that fades to yellow-green during the summer. This cultivar has orange-red foliage in autumn and is female.

OTHER SUMAC (RHUS) SPECIES**Flameleaf sumac (also called shining sumac)*****Rhus copallina***

Flameleaf sumac is a suckering large shrub to small tree species that is similar to staghorn sumac but tends to be larger. Fall foliage color is a more muted burgundy-maroon and is not as showy as staghorn sumac.

Smooth sumac***Rhus glabra***

Smooth sumac is nearly identical to staghorn sumac but smooth sumac has hairless stems in contrast to staghorn sumac which has densely hairy stems.

Fragrant sumac***Rhus aromatica***

Fragrant sumac is a sprawling suckering shrub to about 6 feet tall. The common name pertains to the aromatic fragrance emitted by bruised leaves and stems. This species is best suited to marginal areas where it can spread; fragrant sumac has an unkempt look. This species is useful for areas where soil erosion is a problem. The cultivar 'Gro-low' is a dwarf form that grows to about 3 feet tall.