

# Smooth Sumac

*Rhus glabra*

Red Sumac

The most common sumac, a large shrub or small tree with open, flattened crown of a few, stout, spreading branches. Smooth Sumac is the only shrub or tree species native to the entire 48 contiguous United States. Young sprouts were eaten raw by Native Americans and the sour fruits were used in the concoction of beverages, dyes, and medicines. The fruit and seeds are also an important component of the diet of numerous small mammals and birds. Deer browse the twigs throughout the year. While Smooth Sumac sports beautiful autumn colors, its weak and brittle branches and spreading growth limit its use in the landscape.



## Identification

### Leaves

Deciduous, alternate, pinnately compound, 12-18" long, 11-31 leaflets, 2-4", lanceolate, and serrate. Leaflets are finely hairy beneath.



### Bark/Wood

Brown-gray and smooth. Develops scaly ridges with age. Wood is pithy, weak, and light.



### Flower/Fruit

Dioecious; white petals borne on upright panicles up to 8" long. Drupes mature to dark red, round, and hairy on upright clusters. Persist through winter.



### Form

A shrub or small tree with short or multi-stemmed trunk and spreading branches. Forms thickets. Deeply rooted (to 10 feet).



### Uses

Birds, insects, and mammals consume Sumac fruits and leaves. Because the drupes persist through the winter, Sumac provides food in a time of scarcity. Sumac is unpalatable to livestock. Used uncommonly for revegetation. Ornamental.

### Ethnobotany

Native Americans traditionally made both hot and cold beverages, dyes, and medicines from the fruits. Subsequent laboratory analyses demonstrate antifungal and antibacterial compounds. Young sprouts were eaten in salads.

### Native Distribution

The only shrub or tree species native to the entire contiguous 48 United States.

### Establishment

Smooth Sumac will often form dense thickets from root spread 30 feet from initial specimen.

## Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 20'x15'Wx6" dbh  
 USDA Zone 3-9  
 Light Requirements Part to Full Sun

Soils Diverse  
 Drought Tolerant? Yes  
 Inundation Tolerant? Moderate

### Pests/Damaging Agents

None noted.

### Similar Species

Staghorn Sumac  
 Staghorn Sumac branches are covered with dense velvet of long, brown hairs; Smooth Sumac twigs are hairless. Staghorn fruits are covered with long red hairs; Smooth fruits have sticky, short, red hairs.

### Propagation

Seed - cold stratify; acid wash assists in germination. Root cuttings easily transplant.

### Source(s)

Seed from Orion Farms, Philadelphia, NY.