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Native Trees and Shrubs for Maine Landscapes

Smooth Sumac

(Rhus glabra)

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Go native!

This series of publications is the result of a five-year research project that evaluated the adaptability of a variety of native trees and shrubs to the stresses of urban and residential landscapes in Maine. Non-native invasive plants pose a serious threat to Maine's biodiversity. Plants such as Japanese barberry, shrubby honeysuckle, and Asiatic bittersweet, originally introduced for their ornamental features, have escaped from our landscapes, colonizing natural areas and displacing native plants and animals. By landscaping with native plants, we can create vegetation corridors that link fragmented wild areas, providing food and shelter for the native wildlife that is an integral part of our ecosystem. Your landscape choices can have an impact on the environment that goes far beyond your property lines.

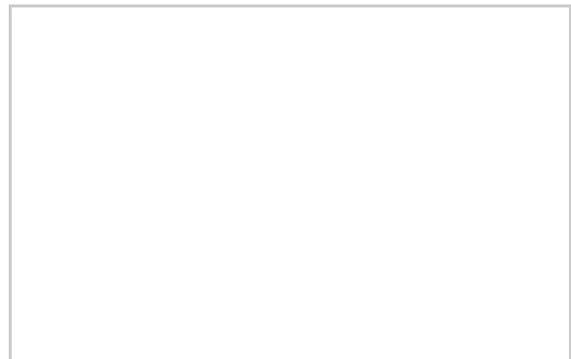
Description

Form: an irregular and open shrub with short, crooked, leaning trunks and leggy branches; forms large colonies

Size: 10 to 20 feet high and wide

Ornamental characteristics:

- erect, pyramidal spikes of hairy, red



berries

- scarlet red autumn foliage

Landscape Use

In the wild, smooth sumac grows along sunny forest edges or in open fields, forming large colonies of either male or female plants. Although often found in pure stands, it may also be found growing with black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), hawthorns (*Crataegus* spp.), viburnums (*Viburnum* spp.), and beaked filbert (*Corylus cornuta*).

Think of smooth sumac as a smaller version of the closely related staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*). Difficult to manage in small garden spaces because of their colonizing habit, both are best used in naturalized settings, along the woodland edge or roadside, or in any location where frequent mowing or existing paving will control their spread. Avoid planting *R. glabra* in shady or wet areas.

The showy, pyramidal spikes of deep red fruits are borne only on female plants. Purchasing plants in fruit will ensure that this feature is a part of your landscape.



Photo by Reeser C. Manley



Photo by Reeser C. Manley

Culture

Hardiness: USDA zone 2

Soil requirements: tolerant of a wide variety of soils

Light requirements: full sun

Stress tolerances:

soil compaction—intolerant

pollution—tolerant

deicing salts—tolerant

urban heat islands—tolerant

drought—tolerant

seasonal flooding—intolerant

Insect and disease problems: infrequent



Wildlife Value

Smooth sumac provides nectar for several butterflies, including banded and striped hairstreaks. Spring azure butterfly caterpillars feed on *Rhus glabra* foliage. The fruits persist into late winter and serve as emergency food for many species, including turkeys, bluebirds, robins, catbirds, rabbits, and deer. The tree also provides nesting and shelter for many bird species.

Maintenance

Irrigation: Water shrubs regularly for at least one year after planting. Apply 1 inch of water over the root zone once a week until leaves fall in autumn: in general, a shrub's root zone extends twice as wide as its canopy. Once plants are established, further watering should not be necessary unless there are extended periods of drought.

Fertilization: Landscape trees and shrubs should not be fertilized unless a soil test indicates a need. Correct soil pH, if necessary, by amending the backfill soil. No nitrogen fertilizer should be added at planting or during the first growing season.

To learn more about native woody plants

Visit the Eastern Maine Native Plant Arboretum at University of Maine Cooperative Extension's Penobscot County office, 307 Maine Avenue in Bangor. Established in 2004, the arboretum displays 24 different native tree and shrub species that can be used in managed landscapes.

Reviewed by Cathy Neal, Extension professor, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension.

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