Southern Prickly-ash

Zanthoxylum clava-herculis

Height: 30 feet

Spread: 25 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 7

Other Names: Hercules' Club, Toothache Tree, Pepperbark

Description:

A thicket forming small tree noted for its spiny trunk and branches and its leathery foliage that is dark green and shiny; small, pale green to cream fragrant flower clusters in spring; nice yellow fall color; can be easily shaped with pruning



Southern Prickly-ash
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Ornamental Features

Southern Prickly-ash features showy clusters of fragrant chartreuse flowers with creamy white overtones at the ends of the branches in mid spring. It has attractive green deciduous foliage which emerges gold in spring. The serrated pointy compound leaves are highly ornamental and turn yellow in fall. The fruits are showy red pods displayed from mid to late summer. The spiny silver bark is extremely showy and adds significant winter interest.



Southern Prickly-ash bark
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Landscape Attributes

Southern Prickly-ash is a multi-stemmed deciduous tree with an upright spreading habit of growth. Its average texture blends into the landscape, but can be balanced by one or two finer or coarser trees or shrubs for an effective composition.

This tree will require occasional maintenance and upkeep, and is best pruned in late winter once the threat of extreme cold has passed. It is a good choice for attracting butterflies to your yard. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Spiny

Southern Prickly-ash is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Mass Planting
- Hedges/Screening
- General Garden Use

Planting & Growing

Southern Prickly-ash will grow to be about 30 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 25 feet. It has a low canopy with a typical clearance of 4 feet from the ground, and is suitable for planting under power lines. It grows at a medium rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for 40 years or more. This is a dioecious species, meaning that individual plants are either male or female. Only the females will produce fruit, and a male variety of the same species is required nearby as a pollinator.

This tree does best in full sun to partial shade. It prefers to grow in average to moist conditions, and shouldn't be allowed to dry out. It may require supplemental watering during periods of drought or extended heat. This plant will benefit from an application of bonemeal and/or mycorrhizal fertilizer at the time of planting. It is not particular as to soil type or pH. It is highly tolerant of urban pollution and will even thrive in inner city environments. This species is native to parts of North America.