African Sumac

Searsia lancea



African Sumac
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 25 feet

Spread: 30 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 9

Other Names: Willow Rhus, Rhus lancea

Description:

A large, upright evergreen shrub or small tree with weeping branchlets; narrow, willow-like foliage is dark green above and pale gray-green below; clusters of yellow-green flowers in spring, followed by round fruit; considered invasive in some areas

Ornamental Features

African Sumac is primarily grown for its highly ornamental fruit. It features an abundance of magnificent yellow berries with red blush from mid summer to early fall, which fade to brown over time. The fruit can be messy if allowed to drop on the lawn or walkways, and may require occasional clean-up. It has attractive dark green foliage with grayish green undersides and tinges of silver. The small narrow compound leaves are highly ornamental and remain dark green throughout the winter. The rough coppery-bronze bark is extremely showy and adds significant winter interest.

Landscape Attributes

African Sumac is a dense multi-stemmed evergreen tree with a more or less rounded form. Its relatively fine texture sets it apart from other landscape plants with less refined foliage.

This is a high maintenance tree that will require regular care and upkeep, and is best pruned in late winter once the threat of extreme cold has passed. It is a good choice for attracting birds, bees and butterflies to your yard, but is not particularly attractive to deer who tend to leave it alone in favor of tastier treats. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Suckering
- Invasive
- Self-Seeding

African Sumac is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Shade
- Mass Planting
- Hedges/Screening
- Naturalizing And Woodland Gardens

Planting & Growing

African Sumac will grow to be about 25 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 30 feet. It has a low canopy with a typical clearance of 1 foot from the ground, and is suitable for planting under power lines. It grows at a slow rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for approximately 30 years. 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 is very adaptable to both dry and moist growing conditions, but will not tolerate any standing water. It is considered to be drought-tolerant, and thus makes an ideal choice for xeriscaping or the moisture-conserving landscape. This plant does not require much in the way of fertilizing once established. It is not particular as to soil type or pH, and is able to handle environmental salt. It is highly tolerant of urban pollution and will even thrive in inner city environments. This species is not originally from North America..