Skunkbush Sumac

Rhus trilobata



Skunkbush Sumac
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 3 feet

Spread: 6 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 3

Other Names: Sourberry, Three-leaved Sumac, Ill-scented Sumac

Description:

A tough, western native groundcover variety that can be used on harsh sites; glossy, bright green summer foliage turns shades of orange and red in fall; foliage has a pungent odor when crushed; tolerant of a wide range of soils; drought resistant



Skunkbush Sumac flowers
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Ornamental Features

Skunkbush Sumac is primarily valued in the garden for its ornamental upright and spreading habit of growth. It has masses of beautiful clusters of chartreuse flowers at the ends of the branches from early to mid spring before the leaves, which are most effective when planted in groupings. It has forest green deciduous foliage. The large lobed compound leaves turn outstanding shades of orange and in the fall. The brick red stems can be quite attractive.

Landscape Attributes

Skunkbush Sumac is a multi-stemmed deciduous shrub 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 is a relatively low maintenance shrub, 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

Skunkbush Sumac is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Mass Planting
- Rock/Alpine Gardens
- General Garden Use
- Groundcover
- Naturalizing And Woodland Gardens

Planting & Growing

Skunkbush Sumac will grow to be about 3 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 6 feet. It has a low canopy. It grows at a fast 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 shrub does best in full sun to partial shade. It prefers dry to average moisture levels with very well-drained soil, and will often die in standing water. It is considered to be drought-tolerant, and thus makes an ideal choice for a low-water garden or xeriscape application. This plant does not require much in the way of fertilizing once established. 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. It can be propagated by division.