

Fragrant Sumac, *Rhus trilobata*: Medium-size deciduous shrub for fall color

Description: *Rhus trilobata* is called Fragrant Sumac or Skunkbush Sumac. This shrub is native to the western U.S., including Texas. Fragrant Sumac is deciduous, 3-6 ft. tall; individual plants may spread to 6-8 ft. wide. Its trifoliate 1.5 in long, toothed leaves emerge after its flowers in spring, become glossy deep green in summer, and then turn yellow, orange and red in fall. Fragrant Sumac spreads via its roots to form colonies. It is generally pest- and disease-free. The leaves and young branches are fuzzy and are fragrant when crushed.



Flowers and Seeds: Individual plants of Fragrant Sumac are female or male, with sex-specific flowers. In males, inconspicuous catkins bloom in spring. Female plants flower in small, creamy

Fragrant Sumac: Left, late spring. Right top, early spring flowers; middle, berries late spring; bottom, fall foliage. Photos courtesy of Becca Dickstein and Kathy Saucier.

yellow clusters in early spring before the foliage emerges. Male plants must be available nearby for pollination to enable the female plants to produce berries. The berries are edible, hairy, red to dark-red in color and typically appear in May. Birds usually devour Fragrant Sumac berries by June.

Planting sites: Full or partial sun is best for Fragrant Sumac. It will grow well in a wide variety of soils, including poor rocky soil. It must have good drainage.

Watering Instructions: Water Fragrant Sumac when first planted. Once established, it is drought-tolerant.

Comments: Fragrant Sumac's colorful leaves make it an autumn standout. Its dense foliage and tendency to form thickets make it useful as a thick, deciduous hedge or screen. *R. trilobata*'s leaves resemble those of the larger sprawling shrub *R. aromatic* also called "Fragrant Sumac", causing confusion. *R. trilobata* is non-toxic, despite its also being in the same genus as poison ivy. In fact, *R. trilobata* berries can be eaten or used to make beverages. Fragrant Sumac is recognized for attracting and providing shelter for native bees. Its berries feed birds and wildlife. Companion plants include Autumn Sage (*Salvia greggii*), Fall Aster (*Symphotrichum oblongifolium*), Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Gregg's Mistflower (*Conoclinium greggii*), Lindheimer's Muhly (*Muhlenbergia lindheimeri*), Gulf Muhly (*M. capillaris*) and Gayfeather (*Liatris mucronata*). Consider planting Fragrant Sumac instead of exotic perennial shrubs like Oleander, Nandina and highly invasive Japanese Ligustrum, a.k.a. Privet species.

Written by Becca Dickstein

Look for the NICE! Plant of the Season signs and information sheets on your next visit to a participating North Texas nursery. Thank you for using native plants in your landscapes.