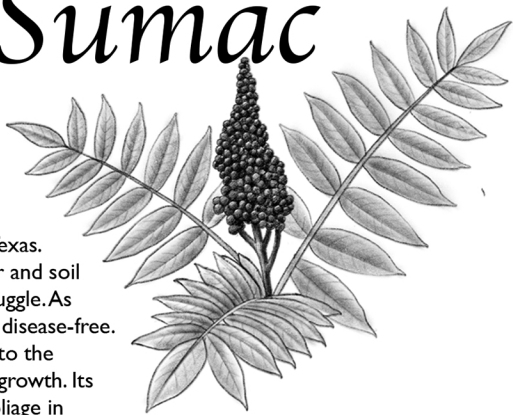


Smooth Sumac

Description: Sumac is only shrub native to the entire continental U.S. It is a survivor, able to grow in most conditions and form colonies through rhizomatic reproduction. Smooth sumac is the most common sumac of the blackland prairies of Texas. They establish colonies quickly, offering cover and soil retention even where most other shrubs struggle. As native species, they are also largely pest- and disease-free. Sumac colonies can also be coppiced, or cut to the ground, in winter every few years to refresh growth. Its bright red clusters of berries and dramatic foliage in autumn make it an aesthetic addition to the forest garden. The shrub was also used as a medicinal and culinary resource for indigenous populations before the colonization of the U.S. One of these uses, to make a tea with the citrusy fruit in late summer, gives it the nickname edible sumac shrubs the nickname "the lemonade tree."



Primary uses: Seed cones will stay on the shrub well into winter, making them an aesthetically pleasing addition to the winter landscape and a food source for birds and small mammals. Sumac is also a common spice in the Middle East.

Secondary uses: While the fruits, which have little flesh and are predominantly seed, are edible, they are predominantly used to make tea with a flavor reminiscent of lemonade. This tea is believed to ease menstrual pain and constipation. Roots and berries can be brewed together to make a was for wounds. Roots can also be used to make a yellow dye.

Harvesting: Harvest the clusters in August but clipping, not pulling, them from the branches. Use immediately or store for several months in a paper bag for making tea. The berries can also be dried and processed to use as the sumac spice.

Plant type: 10- to 20-foot perennial, deciduous shrub with dramatic color change in fall

Leaf type: Compound, alternate leaves with serrated leaflets

Forest garden use: This plant is used to making its own way, and as such can pop up in understory, recent construction zones, and the ecotones that transition from built to more wooded environments. Sumac can serve as understory or barrier hedge, or as understory due to high shade tolerance. It will attract birds and pollinating insects, including honey bees.

Cultivars/varieties: Smooth and staghorn sumac are edible natives and easily distinguished from the more commonly known by name but misidentified poison sumac. Don't be scared away from smooth sumac. It is nearly impossible to confuse with poison sumac. Smooth sumac has serrated leaflets and bold red berries growing on a shrub. Poison sumac has smooth leaflets and white berries, growing more vine-like and low to the ground.

Pollination: Plants are sexed and require a male and female for pollination.

Flowering: Flowering occurs on female plans beginning in May, with fruit ripening in August. Flowers are a mix of white, yellow, and green that fades to brown before red fruit sets.

Life span: Sumac has a short lifespan, but rhizomatic growth allows for continual renewal. This also means growth and expansion need to be contained to keep them in their desired location.

Growing conditions

Light: Sun to full shade

Soil: Loamy, well-draining are ideal, but survives in most soils

Moisture: Dry soils; requires limited watering

pH: Circumneutral 6.8-7.2