

## Skunkbush or Lemonade Sumac



# Skunkbush or Lemonade Sumac (*Rhus trilobata*)

## General Description

Native to the Northern Plains. Spreading shrub, smaller and finer-textured leaves than Fragrant Sumac. Forms a dense mass of stems and leaves. Scented leaves and light yellow flowers.

### Leaves and Buds

Bud Arrangement - Alternate.

Bud Color - Yellow, pubescent, covered by leaf scar.

Bud Size - Small.

Leaf Type and Shape - Trifoliate.

Leaf Margins - Acute to acuminate, crenate-serrate.

Leaf Surface - Nearly glabrous.

Leaf Length - 1 to 2½ inches; leaflets ¾ to 1¼ inches.

Leaf Width - 1 to 2½ inches; leaflets ½ to ¾ inch.

Leaf Color - Soft green as leaflets unfold, then turning a deep blue-green in summer, and commonly yellow in autumn.

### Flowers and Fruits

Flower Type - Polygamous or dioecious, male catkins ½ to 1 inch long, female produces short panicles at the ends of branches.

Flower Color - Greenish-yellow.

Fruit Type - Hairy drupe, ¼ inch in diameter, females only.

Fruit Color - Red.

### Form

Growth Habit - Ascending, new branchlets hairy.

Texture - Medium-fine, summer; medium, winter.

Crown Height - 3 to 8 feet.

Crown Width - 4 to 10 feet.

Bark Color - Slightly pubescent, aromatically fragrant when bruised; leaf scars circular, distinctly raised.

Root System - Fibrous, spreading.

## Environmental Requirements

### Soils

Soil Texture - Adapted to a variety of soils.

Soil pH - 5.5 to 8.0.

Windbreak Suitability Group - 1, 3, 4, 4C, 5, 6D, 6G, 8, 9C, 9L.

### Cold Hardiness

USDA Zone 3.

### Water

Moderately drought tolerant. Survives harsh growing conditions of North Dakota Badlands.

### Light

Full sun, to partial (1/2 to 3/4) shade.

## Uses

### Conservation/Windbreaks

Small to medium shrub for farmstead windbreaks and riparian plantings.

### Wildlife

Important fall and winter food for songbirds and emergency winter food for game birds. Excellent roosting and loafing ground cover. Preferred nesting site for birds.

### Agroforestry Products

Wood - Slender branches are split for weaving baskets.

Food - Drupes used for fresh drink.

Medicinal - Used as an astringent, aromatic, mouthwash, and diuretic.

### Urban/Recreational

Massing, naturalizing. Fast cover for bank stabilization.

Duller foliage than *R. aromatica*.

## Cultivated Varieties

Bighorn Sumac (*R. trilobata* 'Bighorn') - Released by USDA-NRCS, Plant Materials Center, Los Lunas, New Mexico, as a cultivar seed strain.

## Related Species

Fragrant Sumac (*Rhus aromatica*)

## Pests

No major pest problems.