

WINGED SUMAC

Rhus copallinum L.

Plant Symbol = RHCO

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Northeast Plant
Materials Program



Britton & Brown 1913
Courtesy of Kentucky Native Plant Society
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Alternate Names

flameleaf sumac, dwarf sumac

Uses

Sumac serves primarily as a winter emergency food for wildlife. Ring-necked pheasant, bobwhite quail, wild turkey, and about 300 species of songbirds include sumac fruit in their diet. It is also known to be important only in the winter diets of ruffed grouse and the sharp-tailed grouse. Fox squirrels and cottontail rabbits eat the sumac bark. White-tail deer like the fruit and stems.

Sumac also makes good ornamental plantings and hedges because of the brilliant red fall foliage. It is best used on drastically disturbed sites where pioneer species are desirable.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Winged sumac is a native, deciduous, large shrub that rarely exceeds 10 feet. It has alternate, compound leaves, 16-24 inches long, with a winged leafstalk. The leaflets are narrowed or rounded at the base and sharply pointed at the tip with finely serrated margins. The leaflets are dark green and smooth above, and pale beneath, except along the midrib. Compact clusters of greenish-yellow flowers bloom from July to September. Fruits mature later in the fall. The fruiting head is a compact cluster of round, red, hairy fruits called drupes. Each drupe measures 1/4 inch in diameter and contains one seed. Each cluster of drupes may contain 100 to 700 seeds. Fruit is produced on plants 3 to 4 years old. Because most populations of sumac have male and female flowers on separate plants, only the female plants produce seed. Occasionally, plants are found which have both male and female flowers. The germination of sumac seeds is enhanced by their passage through the digestive system of rabbits, ring-necked pheasants, and quail. The presence of fire also encourages increased germination. There are about 60,000 seeds per pound.

Adaptation and Distribution

Winged sumac is found throughout the eastern United States. While sumacs generally prefer fertile, upland sites they also tolerate a wide variety of conditions. All are tolerant of slightly acid soil conditions and textures ranging from coarse to fine. Typical growing sites include open fields and roadsides, fence rows, railroad rights-of-way, and burned areas. Sumacs are not highly shade tolerant and are considered early successional species.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Establishment

One year old nursery grown seedlings are normally used for planting large areas. Once established, stands will spread from the root sprouts. The lateral root system is extensive and spread outward three or

more feet a year. This sprouting is encouraged by cutting or fire injury. The colonies appear to lose vigor in about 15 years.

Management

Sumac stands can best be maintained by eliminating competing vegetation by mowing, chemicals, or fire. Sumacs fail to compete with invading tree species and are seldom found growing under a closed canopy.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

No known cultivar of this species is known to exist. Rooted plants may be available from specialty nurseries.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:

USDA NRCS Northeast Plant Materials Program

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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