

Liquidambar
Altingiaceae

Sweet Gum

Liquidambar styraciflua



GENERAL DESCRIPTION: A native American tree that prefers moist areas, it is particularly notable for its fall foliage in shades of yellow, orange, red and purple that remain late into the fall. A medium tall tree its leaves are characteristically lobed and a lustrous green. The spiny, round, 1-1.5" fruit is attractive but can be bothersome. With a pyramidal growth habit, when young, maturing to a rounded habit and distinctive bark that is deeply furrowed and almost corky in appearance it is an excellent tree for streets and yards. Tolerates dryness.

HABIT AND SIZE: 60-75' high and two thirds as wide (to 120' high in wild) with a clearly pyramidal shape when young and an oblong to rounded shape at maturity. Crisp outline.

LANDSCAPE VALUE: An excellent tree for streets, parks or lawns particularly where there is plenty of room. Can be damaged or killed by extreme cold (-20 degrees). Great shape, lustrous leaves with unique shape and excellent fall color. The bark has winter interest.

LEAVES: Alternately arranged, simple 4-7.5" long and wide, 5-7 lobed in a star-shaped pattern with oblong-triangular acuminate lobes and margins that are serrate. The base is basically flat across. Color is shiny green above and paler beneath with hairy tufts in the axils of the principle veins. Long petioled (2.5-4"). Fall color yellow, orange, red to purple.

FLOWERS: Apetalous in globular heads. Staminate flowers without a calyx and intermixed with scales in small heads clustered in terminal racemes. Pistillate flowers in long-peduncled round heads composed of more or less cohering 2 beaked pistils subtended by small scales.

FRUIT: Round heads spiny from the persistent styles. Individual capsules dehiscent and each with 1 or 2 winged seeds.

BUD: terminal buds with 6-8 overlapping scales (imbricate), ovate to conical in shape, 0.25-0.5" long. Lateral buds smaller, reddish-green-brown and sometimes fragrant when crushed.

DISEASES AND INSECTS: Bleeding cecrosis, leaf spots, sweetgum webworm, caterpillars, cottony cushion scale, sweetgum scale, walnut scale and iron chlorosis at high soil pH.

HARDINESS AND RANGE: zones 5-9. Conn. to Fla., Mo. and Mex.

CULTIVARS: 'Moraine'- good green foliage, burgundy red fall color and more cold hardy, 'Rotundiloba'- rounded lobes' 'V ariagata'- leaves blotched and streaked with yellow.