

Liquidambar styraciflua

Sweetgum

Tried and True
Native Plant Selections
for the Mid-Atlantic



Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia

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Tree	Trees, Flowers, Alate Twigs, Fruit,** Fall Foliage
Height: 60–90 feet	
Spread: 50–75 feet	
Bloom Color: Yellow-green tinged with red	
Characteristics	 
Tall, straight-trunked <u>deciduous</u> tree with pyramid-shaped crown becoming rounded with age	
<u>Alternate</u> , glossy, star-shaped, toothed leaves	
Yellow-green flowers in ball-like clusters early spring	
Green, protruding beak-like capsules of 1–2 seeds winged at one end in woody balls in July ripen to brown; empty capsules may <u>persist</u> into March	
Superb fall foliage: yellows, oranges, reds, purples	
Twigs often form scaly, corky wings hence nickname: alligator tree; mature bark deeply furrowed	
Attributes	  
Tolerates clay, short-duration flooding, rabbits, but <u>not</u> alkaline soil; rapid-growing, long-lived, adaptable	
No serious pests or diseases; deer occasionally severely damage	
<u>Ethnobotanic</u> uses; leaves fragrant when crushed	
Attracts wildlife, providing cover, nesting sites, and food for songbirds and small mammals	
Growing and Maintenance Tips	Excellent Replacement for
Soil Requirements: Acidic, well-drained soil	<u>Acer platanoides - Norway Maple</u>
Light Requirements: Sun, Partial Shade	<u>Ailanthus altissima - Tree of Heaven</u>
Water Requirements: Moist, Wet	
Transplant best in spring in well-watered soil	*It is native to DC and common in DE. In PA, it is found mostly in the extreme southeast. In VA, it is common in the Coastal Plain and outer Piedmont, becoming infrequent to rare in the inner and far northern Piedmont, and disjunct across the Blue Ridge. It is native to NoVA but unreported in Alexandria, Fairfax City, Falls Church, and Manassas.
Use in large, open landscapes or lawns (prickly balls can be a hazard with foot traffic or mowing)	**Depicts green fruit in August and mature fruit in December. Trees 25 years or older produce fruit.
Hardiness: USDA Zones 5b–9	

developed by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, serving Arlington and Alexandria

Images by Elaine Mills and Mary Free (middle row), Glencarlyn Library Garden



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