

# Liquidambar styraciflua

## Sweetgum

Tried and True  
Native Plant Selections  
for the Mid-Atlantic

Prevalent in the southeast,\* this low maintenance tree is prized for its timber. Its common name derives from sweet, gummy, aromatic sap with compounds used in traditional and modern medicine. It has distinctive star-shaped leaves and prickly seed balls that drop and litter the ground fall to spring.



Tree	Trees, Flowers,** Twigs & Fruit,*** Fall Foliage
Height: 60–90 feet	 
Spread: 50–75 feet	
Bloom Color: Yellow-green tinged with red	   
<b>Characteristics</b>	
<a href="#">Monoecious</a> , straight-trunked <a href="#">deciduous</a> tree with pyramid-shaped crown becoming rounded with age	
<a href="#">Alternate</a> , simple, <a href="#">palmate</a> , glossy green leaves with pointed, star-shaped lobes & finely toothed margins	
Flowers w/o <a href="#">perianths</a> in ball-like clusters early spring	
Woody ball of green, 2-beaked, <a href="#">septicidal capsules</a> (with 1–2 apically-winged seeds) in July that ripen to brown; <a href="#">dehiscent</a> capsules may <a href="#">persist</a> into March	
Superb fall foliage: yellows, oranges, reds, purples	
Twigs often form scaly, corky wings hence nickname alligatorwood; mature <a href="#">bark</a> deeply furrowed	
<b>Attributes</b>	
Tolerates <a href="#">clay</a> , short-duration flooding, rabbits, but <a href="#">not</a> alkaline soil; rapid-growing, long-lived, adaptable	
No serious pests or diseases; <a href="#">deer</a> occasionally severely damage	
<a href="#">Ethnobotanic</a> uses; leaves fragrant when crushed	
Provides cover, nesting sites, and food for songbirds and small mammals; <a href="#">larval</a> host for some moths	
<b>Growing and Maintenance Tips</b>	<b>Excellent Replacement for</b>
<a href="#">Soil Requirements</a> : Acidic, well-drained soil	<a href="#">Acer platanoides</a> - Norway Maple
<a href="#">Light Requirements</a> : Sun, Partial Shade	<a href="#">Ailanthus altissima</a> - Tree of Heaven
<a href="#">Water Requirements</a> : Moist, Wet	<p>*It is <a href="#">native</a> to DC and common in DE. It is found mostly in extreme southeast PA and the Coastal Plain and outer Piedmont of MD. 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.</p> <p>** <a href="#">Staminate inflorescence</a> grows upright in a terminal <a href="#">raceme</a>. Solitary globose head of <a href="#">pistillate</a> flowers droops on long <a href="#">peduncle</a>.</p> <p>***Depicts green fruit and <a href="#">alate</a> twigs in August and mature fruit in December. Trees must be 20–30 years old to produce fruit.</p>
Locate away from foot traffic; <a href="#">mulch</a> to drip line so fruits fall in bed below and eventually turn to mulch	
Use in large, open landscapes or lawns	
<a href="#">Hardiness</a> : 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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