Sweet Gum

Liquidambar styraciflua



Sweet Gum in fall
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 70 feet

Spread: 50 feet

Sunlight: ○

Hardiness Zone: 5

Other Names: American Sweet Gum

Description:

A tall, spreading shade tree with interestingly shaped leaves that turn brilliant yellow, orange, red and purple in fall; somewhat particular about growing conditions; fruit is spiny and can be somewhat messy, use where this will not be a problem

Ornamental Features

Sweet Gum has forest green deciduous foliage on a tree with an oval habit of growth. The lobed palmate leaves turn an outstanding crimson in the fall. However, the fruit can be messy in the landscape and may require occasional clean-up.



Sweet Gum in fall
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Landscape Attributes

Sweet Gum is a deciduous tree with a strong central leader and a shapely oval form. Its average texture blends into the landscape, but can be balanced by one or two finer or coarser trees or shrubs for an effective composition.

This is a high maintenance tree that will require regular care and upkeep, and is best pruned in late winter once the threat of extreme cold has passed. Deer don't particularly care for this plant and will usually leave it alone in favor of tastier treats. Gardeners should be aware of the following characteristic(s) that may warrant special consideration;

- Messy

Sweet Gum is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Shade

Planting & Growing

Sweet Gum will grow to be about 70 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 50 feet. It has a high canopy of foliage that sits well above the ground, and should not be planted underneath power lines. As it matures, the lower branches of this tree can be strategically removed to create a high enough canopy to support unobstructed human traffic underneath. It grows at a fast rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for 80 years or more.

This tree should only be grown in full sunlight. It prefers to grow in average to moist conditions, and shouldn't be allowed to dry out. It is very fussy about its soil conditions and must have rich, acidic soils to ensure success, and is subject to chlorosis (yellowing) of the foliage in alkaline soils. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution. This species is native to parts of North America.



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420 Nunavut Way
Kamloops, BC V2H 1N6

phone: 250.828.2111
web: www.artknappkamloops.ca