



Skunkbush sumac

Rhus trilobata

Rhus trilobata, or Skunkbush sumac, is native to western Kansas and varieties grow from Canada to Texas. It reaches a mature height of 3 to 8 feet and has a spread of 6 to 8 feet. Its common name refers to its pungent smell that is released from its leaves especially when they have been bruised or crushed. It has a moderate growth rate and will grow about 12 or more inches per year. The longevity of the plant is between 20-30 years; however, it creates new rhizomes annually so even though the original plant may die shortly after 20 years, new plants are being established to take its place. Skunkbush sumac is used only in the Pheasant Bundle and is not sold as individual bundles. It was requested for use by the local Pheasants Forever Regional Biologist as an excellent shrub in western Kansas to provide nesting and loafing habitat.

Leaves, Stems and Fruit

Skunkbush sumac leaves are arranged as 3 leaflets. The leaflets are egg-shaped and coarsely toothed. The foliage is green in summer and scarlet in fall. Small yellow flowers bloom in late March or early April. In late July, fruit matures as fuzzy, scarlet berries in dense, round clusters that persist through winter.

Use

Wildlife Habitat - Skunkbush sumac provides quality nesting, roosting and loafing cover for a variety of songbirds and game birds. Its fruit may not be the first choice of many kinds of wildlife, which allows it to persist into mid-winter for emergency use when other sources of food are covered by snow. Its twigs and foliage provide good deer browse.

Windbreaks - When used as an exterior row in windbreaks, Skunkbush sumac provides good ground level wind protection. Spring blossoms, summer and fall foliage and persisting fruit provide a year around attraction.

Adaptation and Soil

Skunkbush sumac occurs naturally in a variety of soil conditions. It is found on dry rocky slopes, along creeks and streams, and even in sand dunes. It typically performs best where annual rainfall is between 10-20 inches a year.

Spacing

Skunkbush sumac is spaced 3 to 4 feet apart.

Culture

One-year-old, bare-root seedlings are usually used in conservation plantings. Although clean cultivation will help survival and early growth, this shrub is more tolerant of competition than most.

Pests

It has occasional pests, but none are considered serious.