

Sweetgum: *Liquidambar styraciflua*

Secondary Names: Red Gum

Leaf Type: Deciduous

Texas Native:

Tree Description: A large forest tree to 100 feet tall or more and a straight trunk to 3 feet or more in diameter, with a conical shape when young and an upright, broad crown on older trees.

Range/Site Description: Occurs in East Texas on rich river bottom soils, in swamps subject to frequent flooding, and dry uplands, as far west as the San Jacinto river basin.

Leaf: Simple, alternate, star-shaped, 4" to 7" long and wide, with 5 to 7 pointed lobes and a finely-toothed leaf margin. Leaves are aromatic when crushed and turn brilliant colors of yellow, orange, red, and purple in the fall.

Flower: Male and female flowers are borne separately on the same tree, opening with the leaves; male flowers are small, greenish, inconspicuous; the female flowers are small round heads on a long stalk.

Fruit: A composite fruit shaped like a spiked ball, 1" to 1.5" in diameter, on a long stalk, made up of many capsules enclosing the seeds. Fruits hang on the twigs late into winter.

Bark: Twigs are reddish-brown and sometimes have corky wings; bark is light gray, turning rough with rounded, corky ridges that develop into broader plates and deep furrows on older trunks.

Wood: Moderately hard, close-grained, and not durable on exposure; wood is extensively used for flooring, railroad ties, paper pulp, and veneers for baskets of all kinds; also available as a landscape specimen.

Similar Species: Maple species (*Acer* spp.) all have smaller leaves and winged fruits; American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) has larger leaves with shallow lobes and unique peeling bark.

Interesting Facts: In rural areas, children made bubble gum by combining sweetgum sap with other local fruits.