Nyssa sylvatica


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Bloom Color White
Bloom Time Spring

Leaf Color Green
Fall Color Orange and red
This plant has attractive fall colors.

Fruit Color Blue
The fruit is fleshy, oval and round.

Environment
This plant tolerates drought, flooding and some salt.
This plant will grow in very dry to wet or submerged soil.
Suitable soil is well-drained/loamy, sandy or clay.
The pH preference is an acidic to neutral (less than 6.8 to 7.2) soil.

Landscape Uses

Attributes and Features
- Pest tolerant
- Wetlands plant
- Attracts birds
- Attracts butterflies
- Inconspicuous blooms
- Inconspicuous fruit
- Fruit is edible by birds
- Fruit can be a litter problem
- Fruit attracts animals
- Ozone tolerant

Nyssa sylvatica

Black Gum, Sour Gum, Black Tupelo

Nyssaceae (Nyssa)

Nomenclature: Royal Hort. Society

Type	Tree, woody plant
Hardy range	4B to 9A
Height	30' to 75' / 9.20m to 22.80m
Spread	25' to 35' / 7.60m to 10.60m
Growth rate	Slow
Form	Oval and pyramidal
Exposure	Partial shade or partial sun to full sun
Persistence	Deciduous

Native Habitat
Eastern US from Maine to Lake Okeechobee Florida in uplands to 3000 feet elevation to stream bottom lands. Best growth in on slopes and well-drained stream banks where water does not stand for long periods. Variety *biflora* is found on wetter locations in highly organic and clay soils.

Additional Notes
This plant typically grows with one trunk.
Little pruning is required.
This plant has low flammability.
National champion is 67 x 92 feet in New Jersey. Co-national champion var. biflora are 102 x 57 feet in Virginia and 80 x 57 feet in Georgia.

Culture Notes
There may not be a more colorful foliage in the fall than that of this wonderful tee. Sourgum prefers a moist, slightly acid soil. Like some large seeded tree species, larger specimens may be difficult to transplant from deep, well-drained field soil because of its deep roots and should only be transplanted from the field in the spring. Root pruning regularly during production is also recommended to develop a more compact roots system. Small caliper trees (less than 2 inches caliper) transplant better than larger ones. Therefore, it is usually offered in containers at the nursery. Containers designed to minimize root circling are recommended. Trees are reported to be capable of living at least 300 years. Variety *biflora* can survive flooding for at least two years as a seedling. Plants serve as hosts for butterfly larvae.

Due to the coarse root system, the tree is often raised in fabric containers in field soil, is regularly root-pruned in the field, or is grown in air root-pruning or copper root-pruning containers. The container systems allow for less circling roots along the edge of the root ball; the field systems may result in a greater portion of the root system harvested.

Trees, especially those not on wet sites, defoliate early in the southern portion of its range, remaining bare for 6 months. The large buttress trunk is thought to develop in response to the instability of the root system inherent to trees growing in soft submerged soil. Trees are very tolerant of urban conditions and have survived and grow well along streets.

Little pruning is required to form a well-structured tree since the trunk stays straight and branches usually grow at wide angles with the trunk. Branches are usually small in diameter and do not form included bark. Sourgum makes a good street or parking lot tree, possibly for downtown areas but will not keep foliage well into the fall. It will benefit from occasional irrigation in droughts. The tree does amazingly well in wet, compacted soils typical of many urban areas with highly disturbed clay soil. It is also somewhat salt- and drought-tolerant for planting along the shore. One or two selections have been make for leaf size, canopy density and uniformity, and fall foliage color.

Wood is considered diffuse porous meaning that there is little difference in size of pores between spring and summer wood. Trees tend to have a low failure rate meaning that branches break from these trees less often than from some other trees. Female trees produce fruit but no pollen; males generate copious pollen that contributes to the allergy problems in spring.

Maintain adequate mulch area

Clear all turf away from beneath the branches and mulch to the drip line, especially on young trees, to reduce competition with turf and weeds. This will allow roots to become well established and keep plants healthier. Prune the tree so trunks and branches will not rub each other. Remove some secondary branches on main branches with included bark. This reduces the likelihood of the main branch splitting from the tree later when it has grown to become an important part of the landscape. Locate the tree properly, taking into account the ultimate size, since the tree looks best if it is not pruned to control size. The tree can enhance any landscape with its delightful spring flush of foliage. It can be the centerpiece of your landscape if properly located.

Pests, Diseases and Damaging Agents

Pests: Scales and forest tent caterpillar can cause problems.

Diseases: Several fungi cause cankers and leaf spots.

Special Notes

This plant has aggressive roots.