

## Sweetgum Tree (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)

Sweetgum is a deciduous tree that may grow 80 to 120 feet tall with a diameter of 4 feet or more. On most sites, the tree averages 60 to 80 feet high and 2 to 3 feet in diameter. The tree has alternate, palmately lobed leaves with toothed margins that mature into a star shape. The bark is gray-brown with irregular furrows and rough, rounded ridges. Small, bright yellow-green (tinged with red) flowers mature on stalks in spring. The tree produces a spherical, spiny fruiting head, known as a gumball, which is composed of numerous tiny capsules, each bearing one or two-winged seeds. The tree has a shallow root system and should be planted in spring because roots take 3 to 4 months to recover from the shock of transplanting.

Sweetgum usually grows in a very straight form which makes it a good species for lumber, furniture, musical instrument components and veneer. The beautifully glossy, star-shaped leaves turn bright red, purple, yellow, or orange in the fall and early winter.

Sweetgum is seldom used as a street tree, largely because of its fruit. The spreading form of this tree also limits its use. A cultivar has been developed that address both of these issues, it is called 'Rotundiloba'. Rotundiloba is fairly narrow and is nearly fruitless.