

Weed Identification and Control Sheet:

Smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*) Staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*)

DESCRIPTION:

Sumac is native throughout eastern U.S. and southern Canada but occurs most commonly in eastern U.S. on forest edges, abandoned fields and roadsides. Their interesting branching patterns, height, bright-red fall foliage and colony forming habit make these woody perennial shrubs of the cashew family an attractive option for screening in a landscape setting. The bright red fruit clusters are an important winter food resource for many bird species and small mammals.

Although both smooth and staghorn sumac are beneficial native shrubs, they can rapidly form massive thickets in open woodlands, savannas and prairie settings, making them a target for control in these endangered ecosystems. The shade produced by sumac colonies can suppress native groundlayer vegetation and tree seedling germination.

IDENTIFICATION:

Both sumac species tend to form broad, spreading colonies. Smooth sumac tends to be wider than it is tall. Leaves are pinnately compound, lance-shaped and saw-toothed, with 7 to 31 leaflets. Leaves turn bright red to orange color in the fall. Both sumac species have stout branches that exude a milky sap when cut. Yellowish green flower clusters develop from late May into August. Fruit is a bright red spike containing many berrylike drupes. Smooth sumac twigs are nearly hairless, often covered with a whitish 'bloom' that can be ribbed off. Twigs of the staghorn sumac are velvety. The aboveground portion of the plant is relatively short-lived but roots persist and form new stems. Spreads by seed and underground root stocks.

CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: Repeated mowing, multiple times per growing season as the plants resprout can weaken the colony significantly, but will not kill it outright. A regular prescribed fire regime can help control small colonies, but they will resprout from the roots. If practical, using a sequential burning or mowing regime until the sumac colony dies back would be more effective. Alternatively, employing an integrated system of fire or cutting / mowing along with chemical application may be necessary.

Chemical: Glyphosate (Round-Up®, etc.) can be applied as a foliar spray in August, however this will leave dead-standing stems. Cutting and removing the brush is often desirable. After cutting each stem as close to the ground as is practical, treat the stump with concentrated herbicide. We recommend a 20-40% solution of glyphosate in water during the summer and fall. In winter or early-spring a 12.5% solution of triclopyr (Garlon® 4, etc.) may be more effective, but has a higher potential to kill neighboring plants. It is best to apply the herbicide to the cut stumps immediately so as not to lose track of them. Repeated applications over a period of several years may be necessary.

You can also use triclopyr for basal bark treatment. Use a hand-sprayer, or sponge, paint brush or paint roller to apply herbicide completely around the stem. For stems less than 1/2" in diameter applying the herbicide to just one side of the stem should be sufficient.

Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

Since sumac requires full sun, appropriate alternatives would be common ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*), smooth serviceberry, (*Amelanchier laevis*), black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) or American hazelnut (*Corylus americana*). All species listed above have good fall color, with the exception of ninebark, and are also valuable wildlife shrubs.

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Aggressive
Weed



Sumac shrub habit.
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Staghorn sumac stem.
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Fruiting spike.
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Autumn leaf color.
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