Skunkbush or Lemonade Sumac
Skunkbush or Lemonade Sumac
(Rhus trilobata)

General Description
Native to the Northern Plains. Spreading shrub, smaller and finer-textured leaves than Fragrant Sumac. Forms a dense mass of stems and leaves. Scented leaves and light yellow flowers.

Leaves and Buds
Bud Arrangement - Alternate.
Bud Color - Yellow, pubescent, covered by leaf scar.
Bud Size - Small.
Leaf Type and Shape - Trifoliate.
Leaf Margins - Acute to acuminate, crenate-serrate.
Leaf Surface - Nearly glabrous.
Leaf Length - 1 to 2½ inches; leaflets 3/4 to 1¼ inches.
Leaf Width - 1 to 2½ inches; leaflets 1/2 to 3/4 inch.
Leaf Color - Soft green as leaflets unfold, then turning a deep blue-green in summer, and commonly yellow in autumn.

Flowers and Fruits
Flower Type - Polygamous or dioecious, male catkins 1/2 to 1 inch long, female produces short panicles at the ends of branches.
Flower Color - Greenish-yellow.
Fruit Type - Hairy drupe, 1/4 inch in diameter, females only.
Fruit Color - Red.

Form
Growth Habit - Ascending, new branchlets hairy.
Texture - Medium-fine, summer; medium, winter.
Crown Height - 3 to 8 feet.
Crown Width - 4 to 10 feet.
Bark Color - Slightly pubescent, aromatically fragrant when bruised; leaf scars circular, distinctly raised.
Root System - Fibrous, spreading.

Environmental Requirements

Soils
Soil Texture - Adapted to a variety of soils.
Soil pH - 5.5 to 8.0.
Windbreak Suitability Group - 1, 3, 4, 4C, 5, 6D, 6G, 8, 9C, 9L.

Cold Hardiness
USDA Zone 3.

Water
Moderately drought tolerant. Survives harsh growing conditions of North Dakota Badlands.

Light
Full sun, to partial (1/2 to 3/4) shade.

Uses
Conservation/Windbreaks
Small to medium shrub for farmstead windbreaks and riparian plantings.

Wildlife
Important fall and winter food for songbirds and emergency winter food for game birds. Excellent roosting and loafing ground cover. Preferred nesting site for birds.

Agroforestry Products
Wood - Slender branches are split for weaving baskets.
Food - Drupes used for fresh drink.
Medicinal - Used as an astringent, aromatic, mouthwash, and diuretic.

Urban/Recreational

Cultivated Varieties
Bighorn Sumac (R. trilobata 'Bighorn') - Released by USDA-NRCS, Plant Materials Center, Los Lunas, New Mexico, as a cultivar seed strain.

Related Species
Fragrant Sumac (Rhus aromatica)

Pests
No major pest problems.