

Liquidambar styraciflua – American Sweetgum

Well known for its attractive form and Autumn colour, Liquidamber or the American Sweetgum is a deciduous tree to about 20m with corky-winged branches, narrow and erect in its youth and eventually spreading to 6 to 8m retaining its cone-shaped crown. It has large, lobed maple-like leaves, deep green in Spring and Summer and putting on a brilliant autumn colour display, having rather inconspicuous flowers and spiny fruit balls that make an ornament on the tree in Winter.

It is tolerant of pruning and shaping.

It likes neutral to slightly acid, rich loamy soil. In its native United States, it is found on rich river flats in a range of climatic conditions. It is frost hardy and it is an adaptable tree that can grow and thrive in the coolest southern climates to sub-tropical climates.

Propagation

Seed is best sown as soon as it is ripe in a cold frame. Seed germinates more reliably with 30 to 90 days of stratification (chilling) and can be slow to germinate so be patient.

Sow it as early in the year as possible at a temperature of not less than 18°C.

Prick out the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle and grow them on in a cold frame for their first winter.

Since this species resents root disturbance, it is best to plant them out into their permanent positions in early summer of their second year and give them some protection from cold for their first winter outdoors. One way to reduce root disturbance is to pot up into a bio-degradable container or one where the bottom can be cut out and the whole container planted out.

Young trees transplant best in the Spring into well-watered soils. The roots are slow to develop. The trees may be planted in sun or part shade in soils that are medium to well drained and of medium to high fertility. The trees need medium to high moisture availability and are not suitable for dry areas. New trees volunteer readily from the seeds.