

Oxydendrum arboreum

Sourwood

Tried and True
Native Plant Selections
for the Mid-Atlantic

Though native to parts of the Mid-Atlantic Region,* Sourwood is more common in the South, including Virginia's southern half. In residential landscapes, this decorative tree offers year-round appeal: lily-of-the-valley-like flowers,** breathtakingly brilliant fall foliage, persistent fruit capsules and reddish color twigs.



Tree	Early Summer/Fall Tree; Flowers, Fruit, Fall Foliage
Height: 20–50 feet	
Spread: 10–25 feet	
Bloom Color: White	
Characteristics	
Slow-growing, deciduous tree with straight trunk and irregular, somewhat pyramidal habit	
Finely-toothed, oblong glossy green leaves	
Showy, fragrant white bell-shaped flowers on 6- to 8-inch spikelets from June to July	
Persistent light yellow to grayish fruit capsules	
Brilliant fall foliage from shades of red to eggplant	Attributes
Green and red twigs; drooping branches; deeply furrowed and ridged gray bark on mature trees	Intolerant of dense shade, lime soil, compacted soil, root disturbance, poor drainage, flooding, drought, and air pollution; no serious pests or diseases; deer seldom severely damage except for new growth
Winter interest	Ethnobotanic uses; bees produce a choice, highly valued honey from the flower nectar
Attracts bees, wasps & sometimes butterflies, moths	Attracts bees, wasps & sometimes butterflies, moths
Growing and Maintenance Tips	Excellent Replacement for
Soil Requirements: Acidic, well-drained soil	<i>Acer ginnala</i> - Amur Maple
Light Requirements: Sun, Partial Shade	<i>Ailanthus altissima</i> - Tree of Heaven
Water Requirements: Moist	<i>Paulownia tomentosa</i> - Princess Tree
More prolific flowers/colorful foliage w/ more sun	<i>Vitex agnus-castus</i> - Chaste Tree
Use as ornamental specimen, patio tree	*Though not native to DC or NoVA, it is indigenous to a few counties in MD and PA, besides the southern half of VA.
Hardiness: USDA Zones 5–9	** A honey bee and bumble bee are foraging among the flowers.

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Images by Elaine Mills (top right) and Mary Free, Sunny Garden



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