

Liquidambar styraciflua

Sweet Gum



November 2013

Autumn colour of Liquidambar styraciflua 30-40cm girth

As the dark days of winter draw in, the glorious autumn colouring of *Liquidambar styraciflua* is a glowing beacon which has brought joy to gardeners for generations.

This large, deciduous tree is often mistaken for maple as the foliage is similar in appearance with 5-7 pointed, palmate lobes. However, the leaves of Liquidambar are arranged alternately on stems whereas the leaves of Acer species are opposite each other. The autumn colour is second to none, ranging from fiery red, orange and yellow through to sumptuous purple.

Inconspicuous male and female inflorescences are borne on the same tree in spring and are followed by globed fruits made up of many spiked seed capsules. Often known as burr-balls or monkey-balls, they ripen in autumn and some can remain on the tree through winter.

Native to the warmer areas of the eastern United States and Mexico, Liquidambar was first introduced to Europe in the late 1600's by John Banister and planted in Fulham Palace Gardens, London. Linnaeus gave its name in 1753 from the Latin *liquidus* meaning fluid and Arabic *ambar* in reference to the sweet gum which exudes from the bark when wounded; *styraciflua* is an old term meaning 'flowing with styrax' (plant resin). In Mexico, it is cultivated for this resin which is often used for incense, perfume and adhesives.

Our clients often favour Worplesdon as a clone due to its greater frost tolerance and more reliably uniform crown. The foliage has deeper lobes than other varieties and a greater intensity in its autumn colour.

Plant Profile

Name: Liquidambar styraciflua

Common Name: Sweet Gum

Family: Altingiaceae

Height: up to 25m

Demands: Grows best in moist acidic loam or clay. Does not grow well in shady areas.

Foliage: Glossy lobed foliage with stunning autumn colours

Bark: Grey fissured bark. Branches and twigs sometimes with cork wings.

Fruit: Globose fruits 1-1.5 inches across. Made up of many spiky seed capsules.



Stunning display of autumn colours

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Deepdale
 A grove of Liquidambar trees was donated to the Flight 93 Memorial, Pennsylvania by the organisers of the September 11th Memorial, New York



Attractive fissured bark of Liquidambar



Pleached Liquidambar, ideal for ornamental screening



Autumn seed capsules of Liquidambar styraciflua



Field grown standards 18-20-25cm girth



Feathered Liquidambar 5-6m height



60-70cm girth standard