

Vascular Plants of Williamson County

Rhus aromatica – SKUNKBRUSH, FRAGRANT SUMAC [Anacardiaceae]

Rhus aromatica Aiton (includes varieties), SKUNKBRUSH, FRAGRANT SUMAC. Shrub, winter-deciduous, clump-forming, with long shoots and short lateral and spur shoots, 50–200 cm tall; shoots short-tomentose, strongly aromatic like wintergreen (*Gaultheria*) when cut or crushed (having resin ducts with terpenes); bark tight, light gray, ± smooth. **Stems:** cylindric, when young typically < 4 mm diameter, limber, reddish, puberulent on young periderm, knobby at nodes from persistent, short-projecting bases of old petioles (1 mm); containing colorless resin from ducts in stem. **Leaves:** helically alternate, 3-foliolate, typically 30–50 mm long, petiolate with the 3 leaflets subsessile to sessile arising at same point, without stipules; petiole 5–15 mm long; blades of leaflets ovate to obovate or fan-shaped to rhombic, 5–28 × 5–26 mm, terminal leaflet > lateral leaflets, rounded or obtuse (lateral leaflets) to tapered (terminal leaflets) at base, shallowly to deeply 3-lobed and short-crenate, pinnately veined with principal veins slightly raised on lower surface.

Inflorescence: panicle of racemes, on spur shoots clustered at tips of winter stems, panicle to 60 mm long, racemes to 10, 10–15 mm long, each raceme ± 20-flowered, flowers helically arranged and tightly clustered, buds formed in midsummer and flowering starting before leaves, bracteate, densely short-tomentose with brown hairs; peduncle to 5 mm long; bract subtending each branch deltate-broadly awl-shaped and cupped, 1–2 mm long, brownish red, stiff, short-tomentose especially below midpoint, persistent; axes stiff, short-hairy; bractlets subtending pedicel 2, partially hidden by and ⊥ to bract, ovate, 1 mm long, keeled, puberulent at base and on inner surface; pedicel 1–2 mm long increasing in fruit, greenish, sparsely hairy or glabrous. **Flower:** bisexual, radial, 3–4 mm across; **calyx** 5(–6)-lobed, fused at base; lobes cupped-ovate, ca. 1.3 mm long, green with membranous margins, margins aging rose; **petals** 5(–6), broadly elliptic to ovate, 2.3–2.5 mm long, center greenish yellow with pale yellow margins, upper (inner) surface short-pilose with raised midvein, lower (outer) surface glabrous; **stamens** 5, free; filaments 0.8–1 mm long, colorless, arching inward; anthers dorsifixed, dithecal, cordate-rectangular, 0.5 mm long, greenish, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen colorless; **nectary disc** surrounding pistil, ringlike, 2 mm diameter, with 5 notched lobes, yellowish, producing copious nectar around bases of petals and stamens; **pistil** 1, < 1 mm long; ovary superior, conic, green, short glandular-puberulent, 1-chambered with 3 ovules; styles 3, spreading, colorless; stigmas 3, club-shaped. **Fruit:** drupelike, fleshy, with 1 stone, strongly aromatic, widely depressed-ellipsoid, 5–6 × 7 × 4 mm, bright red-orange to orangish or yellowish, pilose and viscid with glandular hairs; outer fruit (exocarp) tough; pulp (mesocarp) thin; stone (endocarp) separating easily from mesocarp, discoid-ellipsoid, 5 × 6.5 mm, pale orange; 5-lobed calyx persistent with lobes appressed to fruit.

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