Fragrant sumac is a native shrub found throughout eastern North America and west into the Great Plains. An excellent restoration plant, it matures quickly, growing 6 to 8 feet tall and forming colonies.

Tiny leaves that release a citrusy scent when crushed give fragrant sumac its name. While the long-lived shrub is planted for its hardiness, it is prized for its beautiful fall color, a stunning blend of red, orange, purple, and yellow.

Compact branching provides excellent cover for wildlife throughout the year. The flowers are insignificant to look at but provide nectar for bees.

Fragrant sumac thrives in full sun, where its greatest landscape attribute—its fall color—can be fully realized. However, it can tolerate drought and some shade.

A dense habit gives the shrub an attractive appearance while suppressing weeds and keeping maintenance low. It is also generally resistant to insects and disease.

In the Midwest, a cultivar of fragrant sumac known as ‘Gro-Low’ has caught on well. Gro-Low sumac reaches a maximum height of 3.5 feet and creates an attractive low mound when shrubs are planted 3 to 4 feet apart. It is tolerant of poor soils containing clay, gravel, and rock and does fine without irrigation, pruning, or clipping. Able to withstand road salt and urban pollution, this is a reliable plant for tough city conditions. In Chicago, it is commonly used on commercial sites, parking lot islands, and medians.

Since its development a few decades ago, Gro-Low has been planted heavily. Its taller-growing counterpart is not as common and should be planted more.

For restoration sites where soil conditions are challenging, fragrant sumac is a solid choice. For dry sites in cities, there is no plant as durable and trouble free.

A Brockway Tough-As-Nails Selection