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Rhus typhina

[Synonyms : *Datisca hirta*, *Rhus hirsuta*, *Rhus hirta*, *Rhus typhina* var. *laciniata*, *Rhus typhina* forma *typhina*, *Schmaltzia hirta*, *Toxicodendron typhinum*]

STAGHORN SUMACH is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to eastern North America, it has tiny greenish flowers and leaves that turn orange-red, yellow and purple in the Autumn. It is also known as American sumac, *Amerikanischer Sumach* (German), Buck's horn, Dyer's sumach, *Essigbaum* (German), Flora coral, Hairy sumac, Hairy sumach, *Hirschkolbensumach* (German), Lemonade tree, Non-poisonous sumach, *Rönnsamak* (Swedish), *Škumpa očetná* (Czech), *Škumpa orobincová* (Czech), Staghorn sumac, *Sumach pálkový* (Slovak), Staghorn sumac, Stag's-horn sumac, Velvet sumac, Velvet sumach, *Vinaigrier* (French-Canadian), Vinegar tree, Virginian sumac, and Virginia sumach.

Typhina is derived from the genus name *Typha* meaning 'like plants in that (cattail) genus'.

Familiar to many of the North American Indian tribes including the Menominee, some of the Algonkin and some of the Chippewa the fruit (soaked in water) have been used to make a cool and refreshing Summer drink. It became popular with settlers who called it 'Indian lemonade'. The sour berries were eaten by both the Potawatomi and the Cherokee tribes, and some of the Chippewa Indians and the Menominee also dried and stored them for Winter food.

Potawatomi Indians included the leaves in a tobacco mixture *Nicotiana* which they smoked – and several tribes used the plant to obtain various dyes. Menominee Indians used the root for a yellow dye, the Cherokee made a red dye with the fruit, an orange dye was achieved by some of the Chippewa by using the inner bark and stem pith with other ingredients, and the fruit also yielded a black dye for the Cherokee tribe.

For many tribes including the Rappahannock and some of the Algonkin staghorn sumach was a veritable medicine chest. Cherokee Indians chewed the red berries to ease vomiting and cure bedwetting. Some of the Delaware tribe used the plant to ease diarrhoea.

Menominee Indians treated piles with it, and the Potawatomi and Meskwaki Indians used it for worms. While the Iroquois found it valuable during childbirth, Cherokee and Menominee Indians turned to it for treatments for some non-natal female disorders. It was a Menominee, Malecite and Iroquois cure for coughs and tuberculosis, and the Iroquois also chose it for easing fever. The Iroquois tribe employed it (as did the Malecite) for blood diseases too – and it was a remedy for stomach upsets among the Chippewa and Menominee. Delaware Indians seem to have found it useful for venereal disease, and several tribes including the Potawatomi, some of the Chippewa, the Micmac and the Mohican Indians used it for treating sore throats. It was applied to skin disorders by the Natchez tribe, and the Cherokee Indians used it to heal sunburn. Some of the Algonkin turned to it for easing rheumatism, and the Potawatomi and some of the Chippewa relied upon it for general oral problems. In the Micmac tribe it was taken to enhance appetite, and some of the Algonkin prescribed it as a tonic.

The early North American settlers used the bark and leaves of staghorn sumach to make a yellow dye – a practice they probably learnt from neighbouring Indian tribes such as the Menominee. They also used the bark for tanning.

