

# Did You Know?

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## Sumac, *Rhus coriaria*

- *Rhus coriaria* is commonly known as tanner's sumac, elm-leaved sumac or Sicilian sumac.
- It grows as a deciduous shrub or small tree and is hardy to USDA zones 8-11.
- This sumac is native to southern Europe.
- The immature fruits are used as a substitute for capers.
- Crushed and dried ripened fruit are a main ingredient in Za'tar, a Middle Eastern spice blend.
- In Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey and Iran, the dried and ground fruits are sprinkled over rice as well as mixed with fresh onions.
- In the Americas, *R. glabra*, *R. typhina*, and *R. aromatica* were used by Native Americans to prepare traditional beverages and have a similar flavor.
- Leaves and bark are high in tannins; crushed leaves make a yellow dye or are used as a mordant; yellow or red dye can be obtained from the bark and black dye from the fruits.
- The bark and root especially were used for tanning leather.
- Oil can be extracted from the seeds and can be used to make candles, which burn brightly but have a pungent smoke.
- Traditional medicinal uses for the leaves and seeds have included treatment of dysentery and conjunctivitis, among many other ailments.
- Research has shown that *Rhus coriaria* has liver protectant qualities, is antimicrobial and is a natural antioxidant.
- Powdered dried fruits are being studied for effect on insulin resistance for people with type II diabetes.
- Fruits are also being studied for potential cardio-vascular protective action to benefit the human

circulatory system.

- Despite the common name, it is not related to poison sumac (*Toxicodendron vernix*).

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