

Prairie Flame™ Shining Sumac from Rooted Cuttings®

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Dirr (1990) describes *Rhus copallina* species as growing 20 to 30 ft high with similar spread. *Rhus copallina* var. *latifolia* 'Morton' Prairie Flame™ shining sumac, a male clone selected from the collections of the Morton Arboretum is more tame and less aggressive. Growing only 4 to 6 ft in a 10-year period, Prairie Flame's diminutive size and outstanding characteristics make this a plant well worth propagating.

Propagation by root cutting is an old method of propagation. At Midwest Groundcovers the cutting of the *Rhus* hails as the harbinger of a new propagating season. The cuttings are taken from 900 2-gal stock plants that occupy 600 ft² of frame space. The usual cutting date is on or about 15 April in this area. Root cuttings should be taken as the buds begin to swell or when you reach 90-degree days base 50 in your area (90°DDB50).

The process begins by removing the plants from their pots and shaking the plants vigorously to remove the soil. What should remain is only the roots with very little soil. The largest roots are cut from the base of the plant. These root pieces should measure 12 to 15 inches long and be about the thickness of a ball-point pen. The root pieces are then cut into 3-inch pieces. Root pieces are stored in the cooler until all root pieces have been cut. A 13 × 17 perforated nursery flat is half filled with our peat and pine bark mix. Fifty root cuttings are placed on top of the soil and the balance of the soil is added, tamped down to fill the flat, and watered in. No rooting hormones are used in this process. Our 900 2-gal containers yielded 9050 cuttings in 1999. The flats are fertilized twice before potting. The first time will be as roots begin to show at the bottom of the flats with 200 ppm nitrogen and 150 ppm potassium nitrate. The second fertilizer application occurs several weeks before potting in July.

By mid to end of July the plantlets are ready to transplant. The plantlets are gently shaken from the nursery flat and graded into two sizes. The larger plants will be potted into ½-gal pots and the smaller in pints. The plants are put into a house covered with 30% shade cloth and misted occasionally as needed. Using this method you can expect a 40% to 50% success ratio.

The following spring, usually in April the ½-gal pots and pints will be potted into 2-gal containers. This group of April potted plants will be ready for sales just as the plants begin to turn fall color.

LITERATURE CITED

Dirr, M.A. 1990. Manual of Woody Landscape Plants. p. 751. Stipes Pub. Co., Champaign, Illinois.