

Sweet Gum Tree
Liquidambar styraciflua

Liquidambar styraciflua more commonly known as the Sweet Gum tree is a popular ornamental forestal tree cultivated for its distinctive foliage and intense autumn colors. The Sweet Gum tree is a medium sized tree to large tree growing anywhere from 50-70 feet in cultivation and up to 150 feet in the wild. With a trunk 2 – 3 feet in diameter on average and living up to 400 years. The leaves usually have 5 but sometimes 3 or 7 sharply pointed palmate lobes. They are 3-5 inches wide on average and have 3 distinctive bundle scars. They are long and broad with a 6 – 10cm petiole. The rich dark green smooth shiny star shaped leaves generally turn brilliantly orange, red and purple colors in autumn.

The flowers typically appear in March to May and persist into autumn sometimes even into the winter. They are about 1 – 1.5 inches in diameter and covered with rusty hairs greenish in color. Stamens indefinite; filaments short anthers introrse. Pistillate flowers with a two celled, two beaked ovary, the carpels produced into long, recurved, persistent style. The ovaries all more or less cohere and harden in the fruit. There are many ovules however only few mature.

The fruit is a distinctive compound fruit it's hard, dry globose, 1-1.5 inches in diameter, composed of numerous capsules. Each capsule contain 1 or 2 small seeds that have a pair of terminal spikes. The fruit opens and the seeds are released, each capsule is associated with a small hole in the compound fruit. Fallen opened fruits are popularly nicknamed bur balls, gum balls, space bugs, or spike balls.

Sweetgum wood is one of the most important commercial hardwoods in the Southeastern United States. Its wood is bright reddish brown with the sapwood nearly white and may have grain in the heartwood; it is heavy straight satiny and close grained but not too strong. It takes a beautiful polish but warps badly when drying. It used for furniture, interior trim, railroad ties, cigar boxes, crates, flooring barrels, cabinets for radios, televisions, and phonographs often referred as satin walnut.

In pioneer days a gum was obtained from the trunks by peeling the bark and scraping off the resin like solid. This gum was used medicinally as well as for chewing gum. Commercial storax, a fragrant resin used in perfumes and medicines. The infertile seeds found in sweet gum's compound seed capsules are naturally occurring source of shikimic acid, one of the main ingredients in the manufacture of Tamiflu. This resin is still in use today, occasionally flavoring tobacco, and mild antiseptic as a treatment for sores.

This tree is located in West – 6 between 355 north and 445 north and on the park strip of "N" street on the west border of the Salt Lake City Cemetery.

