



Smokebush, Smoketree (*Cotinus coggygria*)

Alex X. Niemiera, Professor, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech

Summary:

Foliage: Deciduous broadleaf

Height: 15 feet

Spread: 15

Shape: Upright, spreading

Smokebush is a small tree or large shrub depending on how one prunes the plant. Leaves of the species are green. Depending on cultivar; leaves can be purple or yellow during the growing season. After flowering (with small relatively inconspicuous flowers) in spring, clusters of fine filaments associated with flowering give the appearance of "smoke". Fall foliage color is quite showy.

Plant Needs:

Zone: 4 to 9

Light: Partial shade to full sun

Moisture: Moist to dry

Soil Type: Sandy, loam, or clay

pH Range: 3.7 to 6.8

Functions:

Suggested uses for this plant include border, massing, and specimen plant.

Planting Notes:

Prefers full sun, but tolerates wide range of light conditions. Shade-grown plants will be lanky.

Care:

One can grow this species as a small tree or shrub depending on the landscape application. Smokebush has a tendency to put out long lanky stems which make the plant look straggly. If growing this species as a tree form, select one (or more) main trunks and prune to obtain a tree form. If growing as a shrub form, prune plant to near ground level for the first two years or so to develop a dense multi-stem habit. This radical pruning will prevent the plant from flowering during the pruning period but the payoff is a much fuller plant than plants without pruning. Apparently, some cultivars are naturally denser than others (e.g., 'Daydream', Golden Spirit™, and 'Royal Purple')

Problems:

No serious problems.

Alternatives:

Consult local garden centers, historic or public gardens and arboreta, regarding cultivars and related species that grow well in your area.

Cultivars of *Cotinus coggygia*:

'Purpureus' has purple foliage and purplish fruiting plumes.

'Black Velvet' has dark purple leaves and showy "smoky" filaments.

'Daydream' is a green leaf clone that has abundant brownish pink "smoky" plumes. This plant is slower growing than other cultivars.

Golden Spirit™ has showy bright yellow foliage during the growing season.

'Grace' is a hybrid of *Cotinus coggygia* 'Velvet Cloak' and *C. obovatus* (American smoketree, U.S. native). Leaves emerge red-purple and turn blue green during the growing season. This cultivar has very large pink-purple "smoky" plumes.

'Royal Purple' has very dark purple leaves and has showy purple "smoky" plumes.

'Velvet cloak' is very similar to 'Royal Purple'.

American smoketree (*Cotinus obovatus*) is a small tree (about 25 feet tall at maturity) with green or blue green leaves that turn a spectacular tones of yellow, red, orange, or purple in the fall.

"Smoky" plumes are showy but not as large as *C. coggygia*. The species is very drought tolerant. Unfortunately, this species is generally not sold in garden centers so one has to purchase through mail order nurseries.

Comments:

Smokebush, pruned as a shrub, can be used in mass to form a shrub border or as a single plant any where a large shrub is needed. Smokebush, pruned as a tree, will serve in most landscape applications where a small tree is needed. This plant's 1) "smoky" plumes during the summer, 2) the bluish green leaves of the species, or purple or yellow leaved forms, 3) the no less than spectacular fall foliage color, and 4) its drought tolerance make this a very attractive and useful plant in the landscape.

This material was developed by Carol Ness as part of the Interactive Design and Development Project funded by the Kellogg Foundation.

