



## sourgum

*Nyssa sylvatica*

Kingdom: Plantae  
Division/Phylum: Anthophyta  
Class:  
Order:  
Family:

## FEATURES

The sourgum is also known as the black gum or black tupelo. This deciduous tree may attain a height of 75 feet with a trunk diameter of three feet. It has a rounded crown. The brown or black bark is divided into square blocks. The yellow or red buds are smooth, about one-eighth inch long. The simple leaves are arranged alternately along the stem. Each smooth leaf is pointed at the tip, tapering or rounded at the base, up to six inches long and about three inches wide. The leaf is shiny and dark green above, pale and hairy below. The leafstalk is about one and one-half inches long. Male and female flowers are located on separate trees. The male (staminate) flowers are produced in spherical clusters. Female (pistillate) flowers grow two to several on stalks arising from the leaf axils. Flowers are green and small. The fleshy, oval fruit is dark blue. Each fruit may be two-thirds inch long. Each fruit contains one seed.

## BEHAVIORS

Sourgum may be found in the southern tip of Illinois and in Cook, Will and Kankakee counties. It grows in dry wooded slopes, bogs and swamps. Flowering occurs from April through June. Fruits ripen in October. The bitter fruits are eaten by wildlife. The wood is used for pulpwood, for

making gun stocks, for flooring and for producing furniture, boxes and crates. Sourgum is sometimes planted as an ornamental tree. Its leaves turn red in the fall.

## HABITATS

- bottomland forests
- coniferous forest
- southern Illinois lowlands
- upland deciduous forest

## ILLINOIS STATUS

- common
- endangered
- threatened
- native
- exotic

## ILLINOIS RANGE

Permanent resident: southern tip + Cook, Will and Kankakee counties

Summer resident:

Migrant:

Winter resident:

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1999.  
Biodiversity of Illinois, Volume 2: Woodland Habitats CD-ROM.