Tupelo or Black Gum, Firestarter

Nyssa sylvatica 'JFS-red'

Height: 35 feet

Spread: 18 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 4a

Other Names: Tupelo, Black Tupelo, Sour Gum, Pepperidge

Description:

A beautiful native variety producing foliage that matures to a glossy dark green, then fiery scarlet in fall earlier than other cultivars; upright, narrow oval habit with up swept branching; Prefers some wind protection.

Ornamental Features

Tupelo or Black Gum, Firestarter is primarily valued in the landscape for its decidedly oval form. It has forest green deciduous foliage. The glossy pointy leaves turn an outstanding scarlet in the fall. It produces black berries in early fall. The furrowed black bark adds an interesting dimension to the landscape.

Landscape Attributes

Tupelo or Black Gum, Firestarter is a deciduous tree with a strong central leader and a shapely oval form. Its average texture blends into the landscape, but can be balanced by one or two finer or coarser trees or shrubs for an effective composition.

This is a relatively low maintenance tree, and is best pruned in late winter once the threat of extreme cold has passed. It is a good choice for attracting birds to your yard. It has no significant negative characteristics.

Tupelo or Black Gum, Firestarter is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Shade
- Vertical Accent



Tupelo or Black Gum, Firestarter
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder



Tupelo or Black Gum, Firestarter foliage
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

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Planting & Growing

Tupelo or Black Gum, Firestarter will grow to be about 35 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 18 feet. It has a high canopy with a typical clearance of 6 feet from the ground, and should not be planted underneath power lines. As it matures, the lower branches of this tree can be strategically removed to create a high enough canopy to support unobstructed human traffic underneath. It grows at a medium rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for 70 years or more.

This tree does best in full sun to partial shade. It does best in average to evenly moist conditions, but will not tolerate standing water. This plant should be periodically fertilized throughout the active growing season with a specially-formulated acidic fertilizer. It is very fussy about its soil conditions and must have rich, acidic soils to ensure success, and is subject to chlorosis (yellowing) of the foliage in alkaline soils. It is quite intolerant of urban pollution, therefore inner city or urban streetside plantings are best avoided, and will benefit from being planted in a relatively sheltered location. Consider applying a thick mulch around the root zone in winter to protect it in exposed locations or colder microclimates. This is a selection of a native North American species.

Clean up Rating (1-5) 1=least effort 5=most effort

Clean Up Rating (1): Flowers are insignificant, Generally no berries unless both male & female are within a half mile distance of each other. Clean up is blowing or raking debris onto the lawn and mow or bag.