

# NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY OF TEXAS

## *Lindheimer Chapter*

### PLANT OF THE MONTH JANUARY, 2010

#### **EVERGREEN SUMAC, *RHUS VIRENS***



Evergreen Sumac is a wonderful landscape plant for dry, rocky locations. In spite of its name, it is not truly evergreen, but like the Live Oak it loses its leaves about the time new ones are ready to sprout. The attractive compound leaves are a shiny green which become tinged with maroon after a freeze. With pruning, this sumac can grow to be a 25' tall tree, although most of the time it takes the form of a shrub. It is native to the Hill Country and Trans Pecos regions of Texas and into Mexico, New Mexico and Arizona, and is extremely drought hardy. I've seen it growing and thriving in some of the barest caliche around Canyon Lake.

In addition to its attractive foliage, female Evergreen Sumac plants get clusters of small greenish white flowers in mid to late summer which provide nectar for butterflies and bees. The flowers ripen to form small hairy red fruit that are enjoyed by birds and small mammals. According to the Wildflower Center, the berries can be soaked in water to make a tart tea which is high in Vitamin C.

Deer will browse the leaves of young plants, so it does need protection. Give it a spot where it will get good drainage. In full sun it will be a dense shrub, but it will grow in part shade...just not as full. Evergreen Sumac is available in nurseries, but is best transplanted in the winter. It can also be started from seeds almost any time of the year, whenever they can be found.