

PLANT PROFILE

Cotinus coggygria



This garden worthy drought-tolerant plant performs for a lot of the year with its foliage as well as Spring flowers, or smoke.

The family is Anacardiaceae, which contains such diverse plants as mangoes, pepper tree *Shinus molle* and rhus. Originating from the Himalayas, Europe and China, it is hardy in our dry summers and copes with cold as well. It is quick growing, deciduous and I wouldn't want to be without it.

In autumn the smoke becomes fire with brilliant colouring of the leaves in a kaleidoscope of colors. It can grow to 3 or 4 metres, although in 10 years mine haven't achieved that, but trimmed the right way it could be a small tree and I am doing just that to the green-leaved species. As a little aside, the yellow wood, which you would see at pruning time, can be used to make a high-quality dye. I have four varieties and none of mine get any summer watering and are very healthy.

Mine are:

Cotinus coggygria which I am training to be a small tree. Green leafed, with pale smoke, its real advantage will be the autumn colour. It's only young but colouring well.

Cotinus coggygria 'Grace' is burgundy leafed and has fabulous burgundy smoke which, cut when young, will dry and keep for a very long time. It colours late in autumn.



Cotinus coggygria 'Flame' is green leafed and more compact than Grace. Its smoke is pale but, come autumn, it is first to colour and is simply ablaze for ages.

Cotinus coggygria 'Nana', the miniature one, is dark like Grace and shouldn't grow more than a metre. Mine is taking forever to get going but perhaps it won't get much bigger.

I have had Royal Purple before and that grew very tall. Meant to be better than Grace but the reality is we get what we can from the limited selections available in our nurseries. The nursery, Everyday, certainly has the species.

A first-class plant for our gardens. I am always amazed at how few people know it in WA.

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