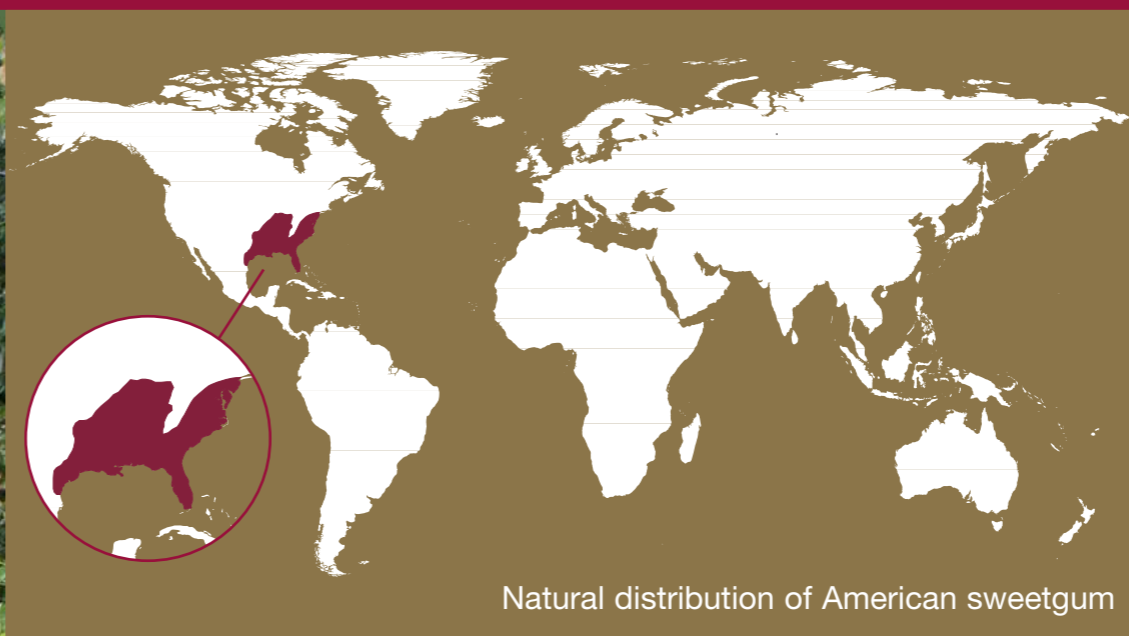


American sweetgum *Liquidambar styraciflua*

Collecting seed from American sweetgums in the wild, to replenish Bedgebury's collection.



Natural distribution of American sweetgum



illustration by John White

This tree is often mistaken for a maple. However, the sweetgum has its leaves fixed alternately along the twigs, whereas the maple has them opposite each other. The unique spiky fruits are also a good way to spot this tree. In winter look for the corky bark along the branches.

These trees are autumn stunners.

American sweetgums are popular trees in parks and gardens such as Bedgebury. In autumn their leaves turn spectacular colours, varying from bright yellow through to very dark purple.

American sweetgum timber has a fine grain and is one of the most important sources of decorative plywood panels. It can be polished, stained and used for veneer as a cherry, mahogany or walnut substitute. It can even be dyed black and used as an ebony replacement for picture frames. However the timber is brittle and not generally used for structural purposes.

Did you know?

American sweetgum resin is an ingredient in 'Friar's Balsam', a commercial preparation used to treat colds and skin problems. It can also be used to make chewing gum.