

Cotinus - Growing Guide

Cotinus - Growing Guide

Smoke bush, Smoke tree

At Caerhays we grow a number of different smoke bushes along the drive where they produce the most startling leaf colours in autumn. These bushy shrubs or small trees will achieve 10-15ft in maturity with a similar spread but, we find that giving them a hard pruning every 10 years or so, rejuvenates them completely. The leaf size on the vigorous new shoots increases and, more importantly, so does the autumn show. In a woodland context you can plant these plants in groups for maximum effect and those with purple leaves can make an effective backdrop to the herbaceous border.

It is however the flower heads rather than the leaves which give this plant its common name. The flower heads appear in profusion all over mature bushes in the summer. While the flowers themselves are inconspicuous the filamentous fruiting panicles are not. These can be 4-6in long and produce, especially from a distance, a 'smoke-like' appearance. This is perhaps most visually pronounced on green leaved forms.

Purple leaved forms grow best in full sun. Cotinus are not fussy about soil conditions and all are totally hardy. They can readily be propagated by layering basal shoots or from softwood cuttings in the summer.

C. coccygria originates from China and S. Europe while *C. obovatus* is from the SE USA. Plant breeders continue to produce improved new forms with attractive and different leaf colours in summer and autumn. *C. 'Lilla'* and *C. 'Old Fashioned'* were new to the Burncoose catalogue in 2019.

C. coccygria, the species, has green leaves which turn yellow to orange and red in autumn. The fruiting panicles or inflorescences are green at first; becoming grey as they mature.

C. coccygria 'Flame' has large green leaves which turn a brilliant red in autumn. The fruiting panicles are purple-pink. In maturity this variety can grow to 20ft.

C. coccygria 'Golden Spirit' has yellow foliage right through the summer and shades of red and orange in autumn.

C. coccygria 'Lilla' is a compact growing variety with red-purple leaves and panicles of fluffy pink flowers. A good contrast.

C. coccygria 'Old Fashioned' has an upright habit with blue-green leaves tinted pink and purple when young. The flower plumes are yellow-green.

C. coccygria 'Royal Purple' is perhaps the most popular form with striking deep purple foliage.

C. coccygria 'Smokey Joe' has fresh green foliage and large, intense pink 'smoke' flowers.

C. coccygria 'Young Lady' has enormous silky flowers with a tinge of pink.

C. 'Grace' has soft purplish leaves turning translucent scarlet in autumn and purple-pink fruiting panicles. This is a tall growing variety which will achieve 20ft in height in maturity.