**SUMAC**

*Rhus coriaria*  
[roos koh-ree-AY-ree-uh]

**Family:** Anacardiaceae

**Names:** Elm-leaved sumac, Sicillian sumac, sumach, sumak, summak, Tanner's sumach; sumac (French); sammak; Summag (Arabic); Kankrasringi (Bengali); Sumak, Zuurkruid (Dutch); Sumahh (Estonian); Somagh (Farsi); Sumakki (Finnish); Sumac (French); Sumach, Gewürzsumach, Färberbaum, Gerbersumach, Essigbaum; Sumach (German); Sommacco (Italian); Karkatakashringi (Kanada); Arkol, Titri (Punjabi); Sumakh (Russian); Zumaque (Spanish); Karkhadagachingi (Tamil); Karkkararingi (Telugu); Sumak, Somak (Turkish); Rudhi, Sumáki (Greek)

**Description:** This spice comes from the fruits of a wild Mediterranean bush. The fruits are dried and crushed to form a coarse-grained purple-red powder. The whole fruit, borne in dense clusters, are small, round, 10mm in diameter, russet colored and covered with hairs. The spice is obtainable in ethnic groceries. The bouquet is slightly aromatic and the flavor is sour, fruity and astringent. It is a bushy shrub reaching 10 ft. It has light grey or reddish stems which exude a resin when cut. Young branches are hairy. The leaves are pinnate with up to eleven serrated elliptic leaflets, hairy on the underside. In autumn the leaves turn to a beautiful red. White flowers grow in dense panicles and are followed by conical clusters of fruit, each enclosed in a reddish-brown hairy covering.

**History:** The Romans used sumac as a souring agent before lemons were available in Europe. North American Indians used the red berries of a related shrub, *Rhus glabra*, to make a sour drink. Sumac is possibly derived from an Aramaic adjective "red". The botanic genus name is a latinization of the plant's Greek name, rhoûs. The species name coriaria refers to the usage of the plant for tanning (Latin corium "leather"). The common name “sumac” comes from the Arabic *summaq*, a preparation used for tanning and dyeing.

**Cultivation:** It is easily propagated by seed, sumac grows best in poor soils. In Sicily, where it is widely cultivated and grows wild in the mountains, its quality is found to increase proportionately the higher it is sited. The berries are picked just before they ripen fully. They are dried before they ripen fully before use. In early autumn huge piles of drying sumac stalks with strings of tightly clustered berries can be seen in the villages of Anatolia in Turkey.

** Constituents:** Sumac contains a fixed oil, a little essential oil, protein, carbohydrate, ash, minerals, many tannins, resins and pigments. The astringency is due to the organic acids—malic, gallic and tannic. Red and yellow pigments give it its characteristic color.
Properties: Astringent; Diuretic; Styptic; Tonic

Medicinal Uses: The leaves and the seeds are used in the treatment of dysentery, hemoptysis and conjunctivitis. The seeds are eaten before a meal in order to provoke an appetite. In the Middle East, a sour drink is made from them to relieve stomach upsets. The berries have diuretic properties, and are used in bowel complaints and for reducing fever. In the Middle East, a sour drink is made from them to relieve stomach upsets. According to Nasar-Abbas and Halkman (1994), they are used in folk medicine for treatment of indigestion, anorexia, diarrhea, hemorrhagia and hyperglycemia. As for the leaves, they are used in folk medicine for mouth and throat diseases.

Other Uses: The leaves and bark are rich in tannin. The leaves can be collected as they fall in the autumn and used as a brown dye or as a mordant. The fruit and bark are also used. The leaves contain 20 - 35% tannin and yield a yellow dye. The finely ground leaves and stems provide the dyeing and tanning agent 'sumac'. The shoots are cut down annually, near to the root, for this purpose. A fawn color, bordering on green, is obtained and this can be improved with the judicious use of mordants. An oil is extracted from the seeds. It attains a tallow-like consistency on standing and is used to make candles. These burn brilliantly, though they emit a pungent smoke. A black dye is obtained from the fruit. A yellow and a red dye are obtained from the bark.

Dye Recipe:
½ pot sumac
1 lb wool
4 gallons water

Cover the chopped or broken up sumac with water and boil for 1 ½ hours. Strain out the plant matter and add enough water to make 4 gallons. You might have to add additional water during the boiling process. Either cool this dye bath or raise the temperature of the wool so there is no sudden change. Simmer the wool in the dye bath for an hour or so. Color: tan. If you put a bit of iron into the dye before you put the wool in you with get gray.

Culinary Uses: Sumac is used widely in cookery in Arabia, Turkey and the Levant, and especially in the Lebanese cuisine. In these areas it is a major souring agent, used where other regions would employ lemon, tamarind or vinegar. It is rubbed onto kebabs before grilling and may be used in this way with fish and chicken. The juice extracted from sumac is popular in salad dressing and marinades and the powdered form is used in stews and vegetable and chicken casseroles. A mixture of yoghurt and sumac is often served with kebabs. Zather is a blend of sumac and thyme used to flavor labni, a cream cheese made from yoghurt. The dried seeds and berries can be ground and sprinkled into the cooking, or may be macerated in hot water and mashed to release their juice, the resulting liquid being used in place of lemon juice. Ground sumac keeps quite well if kept airtight. The Lebanese and Syrians sprinkle sumac on fish; the Iraqis and Turks add it to salads. Sumac goes well with lentils, in a stuffing for chicken, with raw onions and mixed with yogurt. If the berries are used whole in recipes, they are cracked and soaked in water for 20 minutes, then pressed well to extract all the juice, which is used as part of the cooking liquid. Tastes good with/in seafood, vegetable salads, stuffings, rice, legumes, poultry, and mixed meat dishes such as meat balls, kabobs and stews.

Recipes:
Jujeh al Sammak
2 2lb chickens, quartered
1 onion, minced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
6 Tbsp olive oil
2 tsp sumac
2 in cassia bark
pepper to taste
salt to taste

Place the chicken pieces in a dish. Mix the remaining ingredients together, pour over the chicken making sure the pieces are well coated. Leave for several hours or overnight.
Grill or barbecue, turning 3 or 4 times and basting frequently with the marinade until the chicken is nicely browned.

**Armenian Boats**

**Filling:**
8 oz lam, finely minced
1 onion, minced
2 Tbsp parsley, finely chopped
pepper to taste
salt to taste
1 Tbsp butter

**Dough:**
9 oz flour
1 tsp salt
1 egg
water
1 Tbsp butter
1 tsp salt
pimento to garnish
½ pt yoghurt
1 Tbsp sumac

Mix meat with onion, parsley, pepper and salt and fry in the butter until brown all over. Set aside to cool. Sift flour and salt together in a basin. Break the egg into the center and mix to a firm dough adding water as necessary. Knead well, and leave to rest in a cool place for 30 minutes. Roll out dough on a floured surface to 1/16 in thickness and cut into 2 in squares. A ruler makes this easier. Place 1/2 tsp of the filling in the center of each square and fold the corners inwards about 3/8, lift up the corners and squeeze together to form a square 'boat'. Melt butter in a large frying pan, pack the 'boats' tightly together and cook gently until the bases are golden. Now slowly add enough boiling water to just cover the 'boats', add salt and cook for about 20 minutes, adding more boiling water if necessary. Serve immediately accompanied by the yoghurt mixed with sumac and any remaining cooking liquid if desired. (Cooking with Spices)

**Onion Salad**
1 large sweet onion, about 2 oz thinly sliced salt
1 tsp ground sumac

Place the onion in a bowl with ice water to cover and let stand for 15 minutes. Drain thoroughly and pat dry. In a salad bowl, combine the onion, salt to taste, and sumac, and toss to blend. Let stand for 15 minutes. Serve immediately or refrigerate until needed. (The Encyclopedia of Herbs, Spices and Flavorings)

**Stuffed Trout with Sumac**
2 oz butter
2 Tbsp finely chopped fresh parsley
2 Tbsp finely chopped fresh basil
4 large spring onion, trimmed and chopped
2 Tbsp finely chopped fresh mint
2 Tbsp radish leaves, finely chopped (optional)
1 tsp ground sumac or lemon juice
½ tsp ground turmeric
2 Tbsp stale breadcrumbs
½ tsp salt
4 medium trout, cleaned, washed and dried
2 Tbsp olive oil
to garnish: lime wedges; fresh basil or thyme

Melt the butter in a small frying pan. Add the chopped herbs and onion and fry over a gentle heat for 2-3 minutes, stirring constantly. Add the sumac, turmeric, breadcrumbs and salt to the pan and fry for a further 2-3 minutes, stirring until all the fat is absorbed and the stuffing is well mixed. Divide stuffing into four portions and use to fill the cavity in each fish. Close with wooden cocktail sticks. Heat the oil in a large flameproof baking dish over a fierce heat, add the fish and brown lightly on both sides over a moderate hat. Bake in a preheated hot oven, basting once or twice, until the flesh is white and flakes easily. Serve on a warmed serving dish, garnished with lime wedges and fresh basil. (The Encyclopedia of Herbs, Spices and Flavorings)

**Beef Salad**
2 tsp safflower oil
1 lb lean boneless beef sirloin
3 fresh lemongrass stalks
½ cup fresh lime juice, preferably Tiparos
1 fresh red Thai chili pepper, seeded and chopped
4 garlic cloves, minced
½ tsp ground sumac
1 small red onion, very thinly sliced
½ cup finely chopped fresh Thai basil or basil
4 scallions (white and 2 inches of green), thinly sliced
1 seedless cucumber, diced small
Freshly cracked black pepper to taste
Mint leaves, for garnish

Heat the oil in a skillet over medium heat until hot but not smoking. Add the beef and cook, turning, for about 16 minutes, or until well browned all over and medium rare in the center. Slit with a knife to check the center. Allow to cool. Cut the beef across the grain into thin slices and place in a large bowl.

Remove and discard the outer leaves and upper half of the lemongrass stalks. Coarsely chop the bottom half. In a food processor, combine the lemongrass, lime juice, fish sauce, chili, garlic, and sumac. Process until well blended. Add the red onion, stir to mix, and add to the beef.

Add the basil, scallions, cucumber, and black pepper and toss to mix well. Garnish with mint leaves and serve. (Adriana’s Spice Caravan)

Stewed Leafy Greens with Tahini
Serves 4
1 pound young, mild-flavored leafy greens (mallow, lamb’s-quarters, Swiss chard, flat-leaf spinach) or 1 cup fully cooked mixed leafy greens, finely chopped
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 Tbs. olive oil
½ cup homemade tahini sauce
salt
freshly ground black pepper
ground sumac
Steam uncooked greens until tender and drain well. Press to express all moisture. In a small skillet over medium-low heat, sauté the garlic in the oil until golden, 2 or 3 minutes. Add the cooked greens and cook, stirring 1 minute. Set aside to cool.

In a bowl combine the greens with 5 Tbs. of the prepared tahini sauce, mixing until completely blended. Correct the seasoning with salt and pepper. Place in a shallow dish. Thin the remaining tahini until it has the consistency of creamed soup. Drizzle over the greens and sprinkle with ground sumac.

Musakhan
1 3 lb. chicken, cut in serving pieces
3 tbsp. ground sumac (samaac)
Juice from one lemon
1 tsp. salt
1/8 tsp. pepper
1/8 tsp. cinnamon
½ tsp. nutmeg
1 large onion, quartered and sliced thin
2 Tbs pine nuts (I personally would skip this)
3 Tbs. olive oil
Rub chicken with lemon juice, season with sumac, and the other spices. Let rest for an hour. Then, mix onions, nuts (if you decided you didn't want to follow my advice) and olive oil. Finally spread over chicken. Bake chicken on top of pita bread coated with oil at 400 degrees for 1 ½ hours. You can also wrap the chicken like a chawarma and bake.

Fattoush
1 medium cucumber, peeled, seeded, and diced
coarse salt
2 large loaves pita breads, 3-4 days old
3 medium ripe red tomatoes, seeded and diced
6 green onions (white and green parts), cut into ¼-inch slices
1 green bell pepper, cored, seeded, and diced
1 bunch purslane, tough stems removed (about 1 cup) (optional)
¼ cup coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1/3 cup coarsely chopped fresh mint
2 large garlic cloves, minced
¼ cup fresh lemon juice
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
2 tsp. ground sumac berries (optional)

Preheat oven to 375 F. Spread the cucumbers in a single layer on paper towels. Sprinkle with salt and let drain for 20 minutes. Trim the edges off the outside of the pita bread and tear each loaf into two circles. Then tear
into 1-inch pieces and spread them out on a baking sheet. Bake until light golden and dry, 10 to 15 minutes. Place the cucumbers in a colander, run cold water over them for a moment, drain them well, and dry on clean paper towels. In a large bowl, combine the cucumbers, tomatoes, green onions, bell pepper, purslane, if using, the parsley, mint, and cilantro. Season with salt and pepper and toss gently. In a small bowl, whisk together the garlic, lemon juice, and olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Toss the vegetables and bread with the vinaigrette. Place on a platter, sprinkle with sumac, if using, and serve immediately. (You Say Tomato)

**Cumin-Yogurt Chicken**

1 cup sliced onion, separated into rings
½ cup chopped fresh cilantro
½ cup plain fat-free yogurt
2 tablespoons ground cumin
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
2 garlic cloves, crushed
8 chicken thighs, skinned (about 3 lbs.)
cooking spray

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine first 7 ingredients in a large bowl; stir well. Add chicken, stirring to coat with yogurt mixture. Cover and marinate in refrigerator for 3 hours; stirring occasionally. Place chicken and marinade in a 9” x 13” baking dish coated with cooking spray. Sprinkle sumac over chicken mixture. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes. Turn chicken over, and bake and additional 35 minutes, or until done. Serve over couscous.

**Colcosia tuber with sumac**

4 cups of colcosia tuber
1 clove of garlic
Hot water
A pinch of sumac
A pinch of salt

Peel and chop colcosia tuber. Boil colcosia tuber and strain. Fry in oil. Add all ingredients and mix

**Sumac Jelly**

4-6 clusters of ripe berries
1 cup of sugar per cup of juice
3 oz liquid pectin

Collect 4-6 clusters of the bright red, ripe fruit. Place into 2 quarts of boiling water. Allow the fruit clusters to steep in the water for 10-15 minutes. Remove from the heat and strain the infusion through a jelly bag. If the color is not red enough, run the juice through another cooking with more fresh picked fruit and strain through a jelly bag. Measure the juice, place into a saucepan, combine 1 cup of granulated sugar to each cup of hot juice. Bring to a boil for 1 full minute. Pour into hot, sterile jelly jars and seal. (Wild Preserves)

**References:**

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