

Tree-of-Heaven

TREES



Ailanthus altissima (P. Mill.) Swingle **AIAL**

Synonyms: ailanthus, Chinese sumac, stinking sumac, paradise-tree, copal-tree

Plant. Deciduous tree to 80 feet (25 m) in height and 6 feet (1.8 m) in diameter, with long pinnately compound leaves and circular glands under lobes on leaflet bases. Strong odor from flowers and other parts, sometimes likened to peanuts or cashews.

Stem. Twigs stout, chestnut brown to reddish tan, and smooth-to-velvety with light dots (lenticels) and heart-shaped leaf scars. Buds finely hairy, dome-shaped, and partially hidden by the leaf base. Branches light gray to dark gray, smooth and glossy, with raised dots becoming fissures with age. Bark light gray and rough with areas of light-tan fissures.

Leaves. Alternate, odd- or even-pinnately compound, 10 to 41 leaflets on 1- to 3-foot (30 to 90 cm) light-green to reddish-green stalks with swollen bases. Leaflets lanceolate and asymmetric and not always directly opposite, each 2 to 7 inches (5 to 18 cm) long and 1 to 2 inches (2.5 to 5 cm) wide. Long tapering tips and lobed bases with one or more glands beneath each lobe (round dots). Margins entire. Dark green with light-green veins above and whitish green beneath. Petioles 0.2 to 0.5 inch (5 to 12 mm) long.

Flowers. April to June. Large terminal clusters to 20 inches (50 cm) long of small, yellowish-green flowers, with five petals and five sepals. Male and female flower on separate trees.

Fruit and seeds. July to February. Persistent clusters of wing-shaped fruit with twisted tips on female trees, 1 inch (2.5 cm) long. Single seed. Green turning to tan then brown.

Ecology. Rapid growing, forming thickets and dense stands. Both shade and flood intolerant and allelopathic. Colonizes by root sprouts and spreads by prolific wind- and water-dispersed seeds. Viable seed can be produced by 2- and 3-year-old plants.

Resembles hickories, *Carya* spp., and sumacs, *Rhus* spp., but neither has glands at leaflet bases. Hickories distinguished by a braided bark, sumacs by shrub shape.

History and use. Introduced in 1784 from Europe, although originally from Eastern China. Ornamental.

States with suspected
infestations are
shown in gray.

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July