

Tree of heaven

Ailanthus altissima

Family

Simaroubaceae (quassia)

Also known as

Ailanthus glandulosa, Chinese sumac, stinking shumac

Where is it originally from?

China

What does it look like?

Deciduous tree with smooth, grey, pale-striped bark, and leaves made up of 11-25 alternating hairless leaflets (7-17cm long x 3-7.5 cm wide) with bluish green undersides and 1-3 coarse teeth near their bases. Clusters of yellow-green flowers (2.5-4 mm long petals, Dec-Jan) are followed by seeds enclosed in pink to tan papery, twisted and winged sheaths. Bark is grey, pale-striped and smooth. All parts of the tree have a strong smell that can be described as similar to peanuts or cashews.

Are there any similar species?

Rhus typhina (staghorn sumac) has hairy branchlets and petioles, and flowers from October to November, producing hairy fruit.

Why is it weedy?

Grows rapidly and forms dense thickets of suckering shoots.

How does it spread?

Produces suckering shoots from an aggressive root system, as well as large amounts of seed.

What damage does it do?

Out-competes native species for sunlight and space, and produces a toxin in its bark and leaves that accumulates in the soil to prevent other plant species establishing near it. The root system is capable of damaging drains.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?

High light areas with poor soil (such as clay), spreading along roadsides and waste places from gardens or plantations.

What can I do to get rid of it?

1. Hand pull seedlings and small plants (all year round): remove all roots and fragments, as these can regrow, and dispose of at a refuse transfer station.
2. Basal bark application (late winter or early spring-summer): spray or paint 30cm wide band around trunk using triclopyr 600EC (50ml/L).
3. Swab stump (spring-summer): cut down and paint freshly cut stump with triclopyr 600EC (50ml/L).
4. Spray (spring-summer): glyphosate (100ml/10L + penetrant) or metsulfuron-methyl 600g/kg (5g/10L) or triclopyr 600EC (60ml/10L + penetrant).

What can I do to stop it coming back?

Followup monitoring required and treatment when needed. Establishing a thick cover of native trees to shade out and prevent establishment of seedlings.



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Photo: Carolyn Lewis



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