

# 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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