



Tree of Heaven?

What is it?

The tree of heaven is an invasive deciduous tree from Central China that is taking over some areas in our parks. Also called ailanthus, Chinese sumac, and stinking sumac, it can grow up to 80 feet tall and is found throughout the U.S.

What does it look like?

Tree of heaven has smooth stems and pale gray bark. How to spot a tree of heaven:

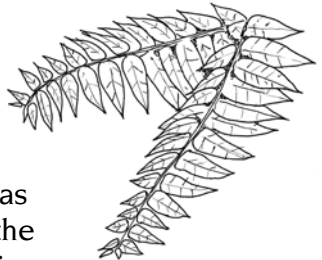
- Leaves are one to four feet in length, with 11 to 25 leaflets. Small yellowish flowers appear in spring.
- The wood is soft, coarse-grained, and yellow or cream in color.
- The tree has a distinct odor, which some say smells like cashews or burnt peanuts.

Where is it found?

Trees of heaven are found almost anywhere, in disturbed soils, on roadsides, along fences, in rocky areas, and in urban areas where they thrive in poor soil and are not affected by pollution.

How did it get here?

In 1784 a gardener in Pennsylvania received seeds of the tree of heaven to plant as an ornamental. During the California gold rush, Chinese miners and railroad workers brought seeds with them as medicine to treat asthma, dysentery and other complaints.



Why is it a problem?

Tree of heaven is an invasive tree that crowds out native trees and other plants. It is a prolific seed producer—just one tree of heaven can make up to 350,000 seeds a year.

Once seedlings establish a taproot, the tree races upward for light and can grow up to ten feet during the first couple years. The tree of heaven outcompetes many native species for space and sunlight, and its tissue contains a toxin that prevents other plants from growing in the same area. The tree's aggressive root system can cause damage to sewers and building foundations.

What does State Parks do?

- Hand pulling seedlings before the taproot develops is the best control, but rarely practical in the park setting.
- When cut, the tree produces large numbers of stump and root sprouts. Repeatedly cutting the sprouts may work, but may take many years.
- Applying herbicides to the leaves can be effective, but applying it particularly to the stump will kill the root system—the key to stopping the tree of heaven.

