

TREE OF HEAVEN



Introduction

Welcome to our "Weed of the Month" feature, designed to raise awareness about the impact of noxious invasive weeds on our environment. This month, we're focusing on Tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), an aggressive plant species that poses a significant threat to native ecosystems and many natural communities.

Tree of heaven is listed as a C-rated noxious weed and currently exists in many parts of Sutter County. It can be spotted along roadsides, near wastelands, landscape sites, as well as disturbed and semi-natural habitats around the community.

Identification & Behavior

Tree of heaven is a fast-growing deciduous tree that can reach heights of up 70 ft. It has large, pinnate-compound leaves that have an unpleasant skunk-like odor, especially when crushed. The tree produces a long, deep taproot with many creeping roots that sucker freely and may extend to about 50 ft. in all directions.

Trees are dioecious, with females producing a winged fruit called samara. Fruits mature in late summer and disperse from fall through the following spring with wind, water, and possibly birds. Most seed falls close to the parent plant. Female trees typically begin to produce fruits at several years of age and can produce 325,000 seeds (or more) annually, a large proportion of which are viable. Individual trees typically have a life span of 30-50 years.

Impact

Tree of heaven forms dense thickets that compete with native vegetation and reduce wildlife habitat, particularly in riparian areas. It is often considered a tree-fall hazard around homes and buildings. The roots can damage pavement, roads, and foundations.

Tree of heaven attracts other invasive pests, including the brown marmorated stink bug and spotted lanternfly. These pests prefer tree of heaven as a host and can damage crops and ornamental plants. It may also have allelopathic properties that inhibit the germination of other plants.



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December 2025



Control & Management

Mechanical control methods include hand pulling, cutting, or disking. Hand pulling can remove seedlings, but once underground creeping roots have developed, this technique is generally not effective. Care must be taken to extract the entire root or stump sprouting will occur.

A heavily shaded environment will reduce the establishment of tree of heaven. Chemical controls vary but are most effective when leaves are fully expanded. Cut stump, basal cut stump, basal bark and stem injection treatments can be used anytime, but are best when used in late summer or early fall.

Prevention

Identification is key when it comes to preventing and controlling the spread of Tree of heaven. Routinely inspect and maintain your property for any signs of this invader. Be vigilant for any signs of this weed in your area and report sightings to the Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner's Office at (530) 822-7500.

By staying informed and taking proactive measures, we can work together to curb the spread of tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) and protect our native ecosystems. Join us next month for a new "Weed of the Month" feature, where we'll highlight another noxious invasive plant and share tips on how to address it.

Resources

For more information about tree of heaven, visit the UC Davis Weed Research & Information Center website at:

https://wric.ucdavis.edu/information/natural%20areas/wr_A/Ailanthus.pdf

For more weed newsletters or information about our other county programs, visit our website at:

<https://www.suttercounty.org/government/county-departments/agricultural-department>



Thank you for your dedication to preserving our environment and agricultural land!

-Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner's Office