

WEED INFORMATION SHEET

TREE OF HEAVEN



Tree of Heaven – *Ailanthus altissima*. Origin – A native of China and Eastern Asia.

Description – Erect deciduous tree with greyish bark, growing to 25 m high, with a tendency to sucker extensively from its roots to form dense thickets. Leaves are produced only on new wood and can be large up to 1 m long, with up to 20 pairs of opposite leaflets and 1 terminal leaflet. Leaflets are on short petioles, with some serrations near the base, at each tooth there are 1 or more conspicuous glands which produce an unpleasant odour when crushed. Flowers are white or greenish in terminal clusters up to 60 cm long, flowers are either male or female and produced on separate plants, male flowers give off an offensive odour which attracts insects. Summer flowering. Seeds are surrounded by a rounded flat smooth disc 3 or 4 mm diameter with a large conspicuous wing about 4 cm long and 1 to 1.5 cm wide, yellow - green turning pink-red.

Dispersal – In the past, most dispersal was by deliberate plantings and, later, by the disposal of cuttings in garden refuse. The seed is well equipped, because of its surrounding wing, for dispersal by both wind and water. It is also spread readily by birds and on farm machinery and in produce.

Problem - Serious environmental weed. The plant can be found invading forests, pastures, riparian areas, disturbed sites and along railways and roadsides. It persists throughout Australia as a weed. The plant is also highly adaptable to most soils and conditions.

It is an important competitor for both nutrients and light, the latter being more severe because of the very large leaves and dense foliage.

Leaf extracts contain allelopathic substances which adversely affect the growth of other plants, which might help explain the occurrence of the plant often seen in mono-specific stands.

The sap is a skin and eye irritant, pollen can cause allergic reactions. Leaves are toxic to domestic pets.

Toxins are Unknown, but are known to include saponins, quassinoids and other bitter compounds.

Symptoms include – headaches, nausea, hay fever, skin rashes, dermatitis and conjunctivitis.

