

Ailanthus altissima

COMMON NAME

Tree of heaven

FAMILY

Simaroubaceae

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Dicotyledonous Trees & Shrubs

NVS CODE

AILALT

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not assessed

FEATURES

Smooth stems with pale grey bark, and twigs which are light chestnut brown, especially in the dormant season. Large compound leaves, 1-4 feet in length, are composed of 11-25 smaller leaflets and alternate along the stems. In late spring, clusters of small, yellow-green flowers appear near the tips of branches (Jil Swearingen pers. com). The wood of ailanthus is soft, weak, coarse-grained, and creamy white to light brown in colour. All parts of the tree, specially the flowers, have a strong, offensive odour, which some have likened to peanuts or cashews. (Rod Randall's database)

SIMILAR TAXA

One to several glandular pads/teeth on the at the base of the leaflets (Webb et al 1988).

FLOWERING

October, November

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow

FRUITING

Autumn

LIFE CYCLE

The species is dioecious, with male and female flowering on separate trees (Jil Swearingen pers. com.). Seeds are produced on female trees in late summer to early fall, in flat, twisted, papery structures called samaras, which may remain on the trees for long periods of time. Reproduces both sexually (seeds) and asexually (vegetative sprouts). Established trees produce numerous suckers from the roots and resprout vigorously from cut stumps and root fragments (*ibid.*). Prolific seed producer, One study reports that an individual tree can produce as many as 325,000 seeds per year (*ibid.*). Seeds are produced on female trees in late summer to early fall, in flat, twisted, papery structures called samaras, which may remain on the trees for long periods of time. (*ibid.*)

ORIGIN

China



Coromandel, March. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth



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REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental

ETYMOLOGY

ailanthus: From the Chinese ailanto, the native name for one of the species and meaning 'tall enough to reach the skies'

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/ailanthus-altissima/>