

Wisconsin Invasive Plant Identification

tree-of-heaven - *Ailanthus altissima*

Life History: Tree-of-heaven is a rapidly-growing tree that can reach 80' tall with trunk diameters of 1–5'. Has previously been planted as an urban street tree. It is the main host of the destructive spotted lanternfly.

Leaves: Alternate, pinnately compound, 1–4" long. Each leaf is composed of 11–25 leaflets. Leaflet has a smooth margin, except near the base where there is one or more teeth with glands. Leaves and male flowers have a strong odor reminiscent of rancid peanut butter.

Stem/Root: Perennial taproots and lateral roots, which are both capable of generating shoots. Taproots typically grow 6' deep, whereas lateral roots can spread up to 90', depending on the soil.



Young trees grow fast from long roots, leading to shady dense stands



Small glands are in the lobe on the base of leaflets

Flower/Fruit: Flowers yellow-green with 5–6 petals in terminal inflorescences 8–16" long. Male and female flowers are borne on separate plants in late spring. Fruit is 1.5" turning pink to tan, papery with two wings extending from a seed.

Similar Plants: Native sumacs and compound leaf trees like ashes hickory, black walnut, butternut, and pecan can be told apart up close as they all have completely toothed (serrated) leaf margins. Tree-of-heaven has smooth margins and can be further distinguished by the strong odor when leaves are crushed.



Colorful fruit on a female tree



Bark is bumpy, grey to brown

