



Weed of the Month for January 2017

Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)

Origin: China

Interesting Fact: Tree of Heaven leaves have a very foul smell when crushed. People will describe the smell ranging from burnt peanut butter to burning tires.

Description: Tree of Heaven is a large tree that can grow up to 80 ft. tall or more. It has alternate, compound leaves that have 11-41 leaflets.

Defining winter characteristics:

- Slight, vertical fissures ubiquitous on the bark of young trees. The bark of mature trees is usually more sparsely fissured.
- Thick twigs with large, alternate leaf scars
- Large clusters of seeds (similar to maple samaras)
- Twigs and branches will curve upwards, instead of growing straight out, down, or at an angle.



(Left image) The bark of a mature tree. Look for a mostly smooth appearance (especially from afar) but with small vertical fissures.

(Center image) The bark of a young tree. Be careful to not mistake it for ash, look at twigs if necessary.

(Right image) A Tree of Heaven twig (thicker than most trees). Note the large, alternate, triangular leaf scars.

Knox County Cooperative Weed Management Area



Habitat: Found in disturbed areas, woods, and along ditches. Will grow in urban areas especially well.

A whole stand of Tree of Heaven along Kelso Creek in Vincennes.



Ecological threat: Tree of Heaven is a prolific seed producer, and these seeds are wind dispersed. In addition, Tree of Heaven can vigorously re-sprout after being cut. Also, Tree of Heaven is allelopathic both with its roots and leaf litter. All of these traits lead to the formation of dense stands in woods and urban areas.

Control Methods:

- **Manual:** **Do not try to cut Tree of Heaven!** It will re-sprout multiple times!
- **Chemical:** Foliar herbicide applications are fine for seedlings, but not recommended for large trees. A basal bark herbicide application with triclopyr is the preferred method.

Tree of Heaven along a property boundary in Vincennes.



References

Kaufman, Sylvan R. and Wallace Kaufman. 2012. *Invasive Plants*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books. Print.