PLANT FACT SHEET

Ailanthus altissima (Mill.) Swingle

GENUS *Ailanthus* **FAMILY** Simaroubaceae

COMMON NAMES Tree of heaven, Chinese sumac

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves

The young leaves have been cooked and eaten as an emergency food.
They possibly contain some poisons.
CAUTION: The flowers can irritate the skin.
The plant produces a greenish-brown honey.

DESCRIPTION

A deciduous tree. It grows to 25 m high and spreads 15 m across. The stem is stout and erect. The trunk can be 75 cm across. It forms suckers. The bark is smooth and grey. The leaves are dark green and compound. They are 1 m long. They have unequal leaflets along the stalk. There are 11-41 leaflets. The central stalk is 25-75 cm long. The leaflets are 5-15 cm long. They are widest towards the base and pointed at the tip. They have an unpleasant smell when crushed. There are small basal lobes or teeth near the base. The flowers are yellowish-green. They occur in large erect clusters. They are at the tip of the shoot. The male and female flowers are on separate trees. The male flowers have a bad smell. The fruit are red with wings. There is a seed case with one dry seed and a long twisted wing around it.

HABITAT

It is a temperate plant. It is native to China. It is drought and frost resistant. It will grow on most soils. It has become a problem plant in some areas of Australia. It cannot tolerate shade. It is naturalised in temperate North and South America. In Argentina it grows between sea level and 800 m above sea level. It needs an annual temperature between 10-20°C and areas with an annual rainfall between 300-2,500 mm. It grows in hardiness zones 5-10. Melbourne Botanical gardens.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It is grown from seed or from suckers near the base of the tree. Male and female plants must be grown if seed is required. Seed need 8 weeks cold treatment to enable them to germinate well. Root cuttings can be used.

Harvesting and Seed Production

A tree that is fast growing but short lived. It can live for 75 years.

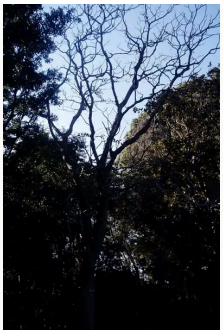
NOTES

There are 5-10 Ailanthus species. When plants are put into marshy areas they drain the soil and thereby remove mosquito breeding sites. The plants have extensive root systems and sucker freely, they can be used in soil-stabilization programmes . Since the plant is tolerant of soil pollution it can also be used in land reclamation schemes on old mine tips etc. (From PFAF). It can become invasive.

PICTURES



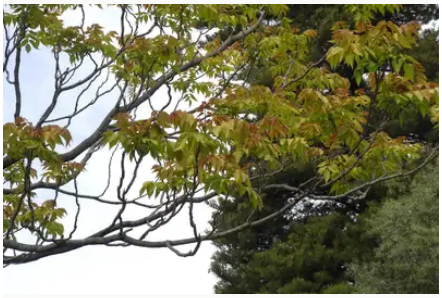
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