

# Tree of Heaven



**Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)** a rapidly growing deciduous tree also known as stinking sumac or Chinese sumac. Abundant seeds allow it to spread aggressively to create dense thickets that displace native vegetation. It also secretes a chemical into the soil that is toxic to surrounding plants. Its aggressive root system can also damage pavement, sewers and wells, and building foundations.



Tree of Heaven is the preferred food source (host plant) of the **Spotted lanternfly (SLF)**, a destructive sap-feeding planthopper, found across CT and widespread in Fairfield and New Haven counties. It threatens health of economically important plants including grapevines, ornamentals, and native trees such maple, black walnut, birch and willow. To protect property and trees, The CT Agricultural Experiment Station says the best thing a homeowner can do to is to rid your property of Tree of Heaven, so not to attract spotted lanternfly.



## How to Identify Tree of Heaven

On first glance, it appears similar to some native trees and shrubs that also have leaves arranged in pairs along a plant's stem (staghorn sumac, hickory and black walnut). Tree of Heaven is distinguished by a notch at the base of each leaf, fuzzy, reddish-brown twigs, and clusters of light green seed pods. If all else fails, there is the unmistakably strong, offensive smell to its flowers, leaves and stems when crushed, resembling burnt peanut butter.

## Controlling Tree of Heaven

According to the Penn State Extension, cutting alone will not reduce tree of heaven's ability to spread, in fact, it could make it worse. Pulling it out can also activate the root system, causing it to send up more shoots to create new trees.

The best method is to target the roots with a systemic herbicide applied mid-to-late summer until onset of fall color when the tree is moving carbohydrates to the roots. Herbicides can be applied to foliage, bark, or cuts on the stem, also known as hack and squirt. However, cut stump herbicide applications do not prevent root suckering and should not be utilized. Herbicide applications made outside this late growing season window will only injure above ground growth. As always, employing the help of a professional licensed pesticide applicator is recommended. For more information, go to Penn State Extension and search: tree of heaven control strategies.