

GROW WITH EXTENSION

Watch out for invasive plants

Tree-of-Heaven
Ailanthus altissima
is a very
invasive tree
species in
our area and
needs to be
stopped from
spreading.
[CONTRIBUTED
PHOTO]



Lloyd Singleton

In this era of conspiracy theories, fake news and alternative facts, I remain prudently skeptical when reading tales of modern day invaders in emails or social media.

Recently, I was intrigued by reports of unsolicited seeds sent through the mail from foreign countries. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) advise those who have received seed shipments that they did not order from foreign sources to not plant these seeds; they could be a pathway for introduction of invasive species, insects and plant diseases.

Anyone who received one of these unsolicited foreign shipments should save the contents along with all shipping labels and contact the Plant Industry Division toll free at 800-206-9333 or email at newpest@ncagr.gov.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is also aware that people across the country have received suspicious, unsolicited packages of seed that appear to be coming from China, and also remind us to not plant seeds from unknown origin. USDA is committed to preventing the unlawful entry of prohibited seeds and protecting U.S. agriculture from invasive pests and

noxious weeds. We can help.

Our community landscapes and natural areas are already host to a lot of plant invaders. Often introduced with good intentions for beauty or durability, we unwittingly foster an invasive plant species that can then spread by wind, water and wildlife to natural areas, displacing critical native plant material that provides wildlife habit and forage.

To arm yourself for our battle, you will find a comprehensive list of these local plant invaders here: <http://nc-ipc.weebly.com/coastal-plain-invasive-plants.html>. Let's begin our battle plan with some prevalent bad trees.

The Tree-of-Heaven, *Ailanthus altissima* is common invasive here due to its ability tolerate poor soils. Initially valued as a fast growing urban street tree widely planted in the northeast, it has invaded urban, agricultural, and forested areas.

Native to China, the female tree flowers in summer with the potential to produce more than 300,000 seeds annually. Flowers are greenish-yellow and grow in clusters. The seeds are light and spread easily through the wind; they are enclosed in a twisted papery pod.

Established trees continually spread by sending up root suckers that may emerge as far as 50 feet from the parent tree. A cut or injured ailanthus tree may send up dozens of root sprouts. Sprouts as young as two years are capable of producing seed. Tree-of-heaven will quickly colonize disturbed

areas, taking advantage of forests defoliated by insects or impacted by wind and other disturbances. Due to its extensive root system and re-sprouting ability, tree-of-heaven is difficult to control; contact our office for specific advice.

The Princess Tree, *Paulownia tomentosa* is also from China. Folks think they are pretty with the large heart-shaped leaves and conspicuous clusters of showy, pale violet, fragrant flowers in the spring. This tree can reproduce prolifically from seed, with a single tree capable of producing an estimated twenty million seeds that are easily transported long distances by wind and water and may germinate shortly after reaching suitable soil. Root sprouts can grow more than 15 feet in a single season.

Some other local tree targets for our battle: Bradford Pear *Pyrus calleryana*, Mimosa *Albizia julibrissin*, Popcorn or Chinese Tallow Tree *Triadica sebifera*. Prepare for battle against these invaders!

Our plant clinic is currently closed for in-person consultation, but you can email invasive plant questions and digital pictures to susan_brown@ncsu.edu.

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