

## February 2024 Plant of the Month



*Ailanthus altissima* (Mill.) Swingle, Tree of heaven, Stinking Sumac

February's *Plant of the Month* is a familiar tree in urban landscapes, disturbed soils, and on roadsides. Tree of heaven is a non-native tree found throughout the State in disturbed habitats. This tree rarely invades native forests, but is at home in open sunny roadsides and farm field edges. The tree is a member of the Simaroubaceae, a tropical family native to eastern Asia, China, and Taiwan. This plant was first introduced into North America in the late 18th century as a landscape and street tree. Hough (1983) cites a local status State-wide. Today, forty years later, the species is a common sight in all urban landscapes. The tree of heaven is a natural host to an introduced pest, the lantern fly. This insect is attacking specimens of tree of heaven (and other species) throughout its New Jersey range.

The species has wood product uses that are not used in North America, such as for varnish and light wood for construction. The tree is also a food source for the silk moth. The Plant of the Month leaf shape is similar to black walnut. Both have compound leaves with many leaflets. *Ailanthus*, however, is distinguished by a small tooth-like projection found on all leaves. The leaves when crushed have a "rotten peanut butter" smell until the pungent walnut odor.

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