Ailanthus

DID YOU KNOW?

Ailanthus can grow in places where almost nothing else will grow. It can even grow out of cracks in sidewalks in polluted cities.

ORIGINS

Ailanthus is a native of China. In the US, it was first planted in Philadelphia in 1784. It was a popular tree among urban gardeners because of its large, beautiful leaves, rapid growth, and hardiness. Now it is considered a weedy pest because it quickly takes over new areas.

CLASSIFYING AILANTHUS

FAMILY

Simaroubaceae (Quassia family)

There are about 150 members in this family. Most are tropical trees and shrubs.

The family is named after its members in the genus *Simarouba*.

The common name for the family, quassia, comes from one of its members, the quassia tree. This tree was named after a famous healer in Surinam, who used its bark to cure fevers. All the tropical trees and shrubs in the quassia family have bitter tasting wood. A chemical called quassiin, taken from the heartwood of some species, is used in insecticides.

Simarouba glauca (paradise tree)

Quassia amara (quassia tree)

GENUS

Ailanthus

There are about 10 species in this genus, all native to Asia and Australia.

A. malabarica

A. altissima

"Ailanthus" comes from the Moluccan word meaning "sky tree" or "tree of heaven." (Molucca is a language spoken on some of the islands of Indonesia.)

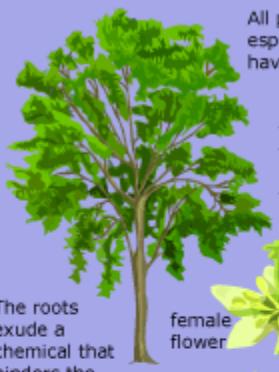
SPECIES

altissima

"Altissima" is Latin for "tallest." Ailanthus grows to over eight stories high.

THE AILANTHUS PLANT

Ailanthus trees grow rapidly, and can reach 25 meters (80 ft) or more in height.



All parts of the plant, but especially the flowers, have a strong smell.

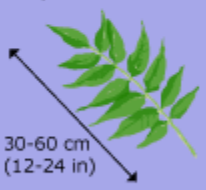
In spring, yellow flowers appear at the tips of the branches. Male and female flowers are on different trees.

The roots exude a chemical that hinders the growth of other plants.

female flower

male flower

The leaves are large with pointed leaflets.

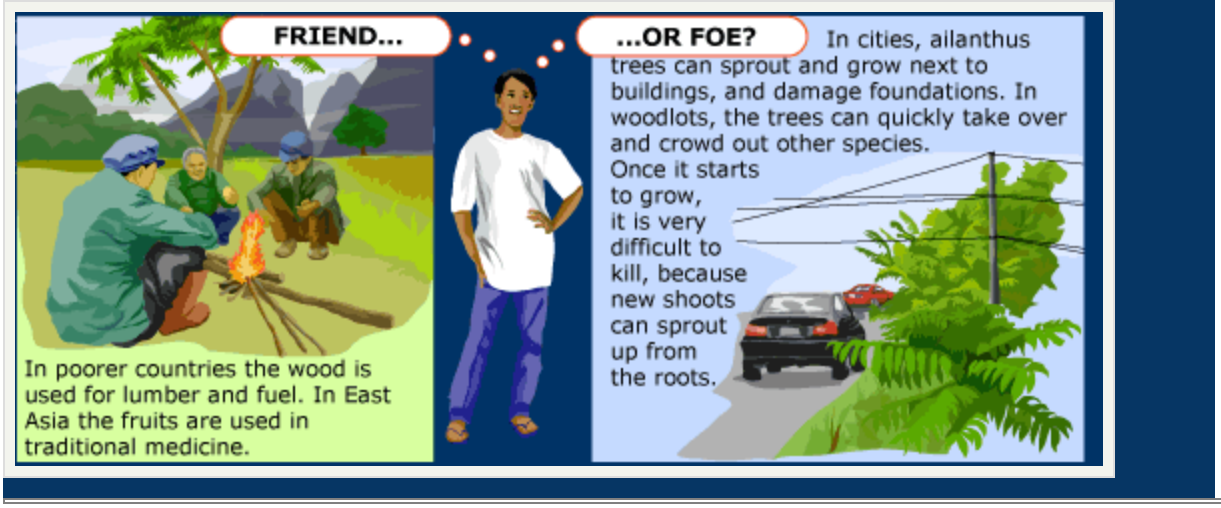


30-60 cm (12-24 in)

In summer and early fall, clusters of red fruits ripen on the female trees. One tree can produce thousands of fruits each year, which are blown by the wind to new growing places.

Each fruit has one seed.

A cluster of fruit is 15-30 cm (6-12 in) long.



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