

# “B” Rated Weeds

A weed of economic importance which is regionally abundant,  
but may have limited distribution in some counties

**Tree-of-heaven**  
*Ailanthus altissima*

**Other common names:**

**USDA symbol:** AIAL  
**ODA rating:** B



**Introduction:** Tree-of-heaven is native to China. Many of the west coast populations were the result of Chinese laborers importing and growing the plant for use in herbal medicine. It forms thickets utilizing creeping roots that are difficult to remove or control.

**Distribution in Oregon:** The first documented site of Tree-of-heaven in Oregon was in 1904 in Wasco County. Currently it is scattered throughout western Oregon, mostly escaped from urban plantings. It is very abundant along the Columbia River and populations are also expanding along the pools of the Snake River Dams at Brownlee and Hells Canyon.

**Description:** Tree-of-Heaven can reach a height of 25 to 50 feet. The leaves are often mistaken for sumac, with prominent leaf scars on the bark remaining when they are detached from the stem in the fall. The flowers are small, yellowish to reddish in color, and have five petals. Tree-of-heaven has a rank odor, similar to foul smelling peanuts.

**Impacts:** Tree-of-heaven creates problems in natural systems by forming large thickets via root suckering. Riparian areas are especially affected. Western Oregon populations invade road rights-of-way, parks, and private property. Its growth outpaces many native trees, which reduces the biodiversity of important habitats. Lateral rooting can push up pavement and sidewalks and has been noted to ruin septic tank drain fields in its search for moisture. It produces large numbers of seeds and vigorously resprouts after cutting, making control difficult. Herbicide applications while the tree is leafed out have been minimally successful.

**Biological controls:** Biological control is not yet available for tree-of-heaven, but researchers are seeking approval for the release of the weevil *Eucryptorhynchus brandti*.

