
Ailanthus altissima, Tree of Heaven

Posted by moss - 09/26/2007 06:39pm

Ailanthus altissima also known as Tree of Heaven or just sumac

This is a tree found in disturbed landscape, often in urban areas. In the most tree unfriendly urban locations it may be the only species able to survive. Ailanthus is regarded as an invasive species in North America and is widely disliked, but it is remarkable in its ability to absorb and resist the effects of pollutants. In the city it is here to stay and once in awhile a good climber can be found. Its wood is fairly light and soft, similar to some poplar species in density if not lighter. Before climbing a vigilant inspection is required, the tree is not forgiving. If there is a hollow or co-dominant or otherwise compromised aspect of the tree structure it must be identified: branch or trunk failure is a real possibility. I tie into heavier than usual branches to be on the safe side but have found that if the trunk, limb or joint is healthy, the wood is quite strong even to narrow diameters. Even so it is best to locate a top to bottom healthy specimen and tie-in where the branch joins the trunk or create a false crotch on a spar. The bark is smooth and friendly and doesn't grab your throwbag. It's relatively easy to advance your rope in its simple branch structure. The ailanthus is monoecious meaning one house for each gender: there are male and female trees. The male tree in flower smells like an alley full of tomcats but otherwise the tree is inoffensive. I like the ailanthus for its exotic and primitive quality, the pinnate leaf structure reminds me of the paintings of Henri Rousseau, once you get over the tree's bad reputation it can start to grow on you.

-moss

Re:Ailanthus altissima

Posted by moss - 09/26/2007 08:50pm

Climber in ailanthus

http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1397/1445430062_8970aeb4c.jpg

Re:Ailanthus altissima

Posted by nickfromwi - 09/28/2007 02:10am

Moss, you are nuts!!! :woohoo: Those trees just plain stink. The first one I ever climbed was in NJ. I climbed up, tied in, then was about to descend and my coworker said from an adjacent tree, "what are you doing?" He then looked at my TIP, then pointed to a limb on his tree, confirmed with me that I thought my TIP and his branch were the same size, then he snapped the branch in his hand.

That was a quick lesson for me!

I despise this species of tree for a couple reasons. 1- the smell. I get nauseas from the smell of the leaves or the stench that wafts from a broken twig. 2- weak branches 3-you put it in a nice manner, focusing on the strength of the tree, but where it grows...it GROWS. If there's one, look around. You'll surely find babies growing in multitude nearby.

At least, that is how things are here in los angeles. I see them growing by the hundreds along the freeways, between buildings that are too close for the tree to grow, in the cracks of the sidewalks, in window sills...

THERE'S ONE NOW!!!!

:S

love
nick

Re:Ailanthus altissima

Posted by moss - 09/28/2007 09:38am

I was waiting for a strong response :-)) I don't find that they smell much unless the male is in flower or you start busting out branches. The smell reminds me of some of the eucalyptus species. The tree in the photo above is on an island off

the coast of Rhode Island. Ailanthus has naturalized there and is actually quite nice looking in the setting and the trees are very healthy. It doesn't seem to propagate in the expected invasive manner, the ocean weather and native shrubs and trees keep it in its place. In the city the health and structure is usually pretty bad from growing up in alleyways and between sidewalk cracks etc.

Here's my hulking neighborhood ailanthus (on the left) which throws down a big branch once in awhile, this one during high winds:

http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1219/908372100_4a4a1cca4c.jpg

-moss

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