Control of Ailanthus in Residential Areas

Ailanthus (Ailanthus altissima), also known as tree-of-heaven, shumac, stink-tree, or Chinese sumac is an introduced weed tree that is a common problem in many areas of the United States. It has long been established in some urban and agricultural areas, and increasingly invades our forests, displacing more desirable native trees. It is very difficult to control due to the tree’s ability, when cut, to re-sprout from the stump and to root sucker prolifically from the shallow surface roots. Effective control of ailanthus requires depleting or killing the root system.

While there are certain products and techniques that may be used by commercial users and owners of large properties with a lot of ailanthus to control, these are not always practical for a homeowner with a few ailanthus trees. One option is to obtain the services of a commercial pesticide applicator. Companies that provide this service may be listed in the yellow pages of the phone book under “weed control” or “tree service”. Make sure that the business is a state-licensed pesticide applicator with experience in controlling ailanthus. Depending upon your time and abilities and the extent of the infestation you may also choose to control the ailanthus yourself.

The following methods may be used for treatment of ailanthus in residential areas, and the herbicides mentioned are labeled for homeowner uses. Although not usually as effective as commercial type products and methods, with proper application and follow-up work, ailanthus can be controlled using the techniques described here.

Manual and Mechanical Control
Mechanical control of ailanthus without the use of chemical herbicides is rarely effective, and initially makes the problem much worse due to the tree’s ability to re-sprout from the stump with great vigor and to produce large numbers of root suckers from the extensive root system. If this method is used, cut the tree off close to the ground during June or July, when the tree’s reserves of food stored in the roots are lowest. Never cut the tree off the first time during any other time of year. Then frequently cut the re-growth for several years, at least monthly during the growing season. In areas that can be mowed regularly, control of the root suckers is easier. This will deplete the root system’s stored food supply and ability to re-grow. Never allow the tree to keep live leaves for very long, as this will allow the tree to re-supply the root system. Where the time and difficulty of this repeated cutting is not acceptable, the use of chemical herbicides may be warranted.

Cut Stump Treatment
Using a chainsaw, handsaw or similar tool, cut the tree off close to the ground, leaving a
flat-topped stump. Do this during June or July, when the tree’s reserves of food stored in the roots are lowest, never during any other time of year. Immediately after cutting (don’t even wait five minutes), apply one of the undiluted herbicide products listed below to the surface of the stump using a disposable paintbrush. Wear disposable rubber gloves and put the herbicide (only as much as needed at a time) into a small disposable container such as a metal can. Apply a liberal coating of the product to the cut stump, especially the top edge of the stump. Do not let the herbicide contact any non-target plants. Wait a few minutes and re-apply again to the top of the ailanthus stump where it has soaked into the wood. When finished, wrap the paintbrush, can and gloves in newspaper and place in the garbage. Any unused herbicide should be kept in the original container and stored properly for later use. This method should effectively prevent re-sprouting from the stump, but some root suckering may still occur. Any re-growth must be quickly and regularly cut as described above under “Manual and Mechanical Control”, or must be killed by foliar spray as described below.

**Foliar Spray**
This is the most effective method to use, but is limited to situations where the entire foliage of the tree can be sprayed without contact onto susceptible desirable plants, the applicator, other persons, etc. The herbicide products listed below, used as directed, will not kill established grass, but contact of the spray with foliage could damage or kill other types of plants. Foliar spraying is a good method to use for control of any re-growth that occurs following the cut stump described above. The spray can be applied from a small trigger-squirt bottle of the type sometimes used for houseplants, or a pump-up pressure cylinder sprayer of the type typically used for garden and landscape spraying. Depending on the sprayer, the location and the limitations above, foliar application may be appropriate on trees up to 10 ft. tall. The herbicide is mixed with water as described on the product label, and applied to thoroughly wet the foliage and green twigs, especially at the top of the tree. The initial treatment should be made during June, July or August, but can also be made in September for purposes of root sucker control. If the tree has not had any prior disturbance (such as cutting), one foliar treatment will usually eliminate the tree, though you should be prepared to do a follow-up spray if needed. When prior disturbance has occurred the tree may continue to root sucker for some time after initial treatment, and repeated foliar applications may be needed. Wear rubber gloves and goggles for mixing and application. Clean, store and dispose of tools and materials as described in the label.

**Products**
The following products are labeled for use in non-cropland residential areas, and are often marketed in small quantities through garden centers and home improvement stores. The listing does not by imply endorsement or suitability to the exclusion of other products that may also be suitable. Be sure to read and follow all label instructions and restrictions.

Bayer Power Force Brushkiller Plus. Active ingredient - 8.8% triclopyr amine. This product may be used for cut stump treatment or foliar treatment as described above. Estimated average retail cost is about $18 per quart.

Ortho Brush-B-Gon. Active ingredient - 8% triclopyr amine. This product may be used for cut stump treatment or foliar treatment as described above. Be sure not to purchase
Weed-B-Gon, since it is not labeled or effective for ailanthus control. Estimated average retail cost is about $9 per pint.

Note: Roundup, Kleenup, or similar products containing glyphosate as an active material are not very effective for cut stump treatment of ailanthus. They may be used for foliar treatment, though they are not as effective as the products listed above, and foliar spray contact will kill grass as well as damage or kill other plants.

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