



Invasive Plant Alert¹

Japanese Angelica Tree

Aralia elata (Miq.) Seem.



Figure 1 Japanese Angelica tree.
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Gardens

In the aralia or ginseng family (Araliaceae), Japanese angelica tree is native to east Asia and was introduced as an ornamental plant. It poses a threat to native species and natural habitats by shading out and preventing the growth of native plant species.

Where to Look

In the US, it has been reported to be invasive in Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington and Wisconsin. In the NPS National Capital Region, it occurs in

Catoctin and Rock Creek parks where it is found in disturbed open areas and forest edges with a preference for moist, well-drained soils.

Identifying the Plant

Japanese angelica tree (JAT) is a small deciduous tree that grows rapidly in full to partial sun and can reach 40 feet in height. It is more robust and usually larger than its native relative, Devil's walking stick (*A. spinosa*) but it can be very challenging to tell them apart. The best strategy is to wait until flowering. The base of the terminal inflorescence stalk of the native is long and stretched out; JAT has a very short axis and the inflorescence emerges abruptly from the top of the trunk.



Figure 2 Inflorescence of native *A. spinosa*. Picture from (c) 2003 Steven J. Baskauf.

The branches of Japanese angelica tree spread irregularly, and the thick stems present leaf scars and prickles. The large compound leaves are alternate and leaflets have serrated margins. In JAT, the

lateral veins run all the way to the margin of most leaflets.

JAT flowers late July to August, forming large branched clusters of many tiny white creamy flowers. The inflorescences are wider than long with no obvious central axis. Fruits are small round black drupes.



Figure 3 Inflorescence of *A. elata*. Dr. Nick V. Kurzenko

How to get rid of it?

Control is difficult. Plants can be pulled by hand or dug up, removing the roots. Mowing or cutting and treating cut stems immediately with approved systemic herbicide like glyphosate is a very effective option.

Resources

New York. Non-native Plant Invasiveness Ranking Form. http://www.nyis.info/user_uploads/02750_Aralia.elata.NYS.pdf

U.S. Forest Service. 2005. Weed of the Week: Japanese angelica tree. http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/japanese-angelica-tree.pdf

¹ This species has been identified as a potential or emerging threat to natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region