

# Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

## Japanese Angelica Tree

*Aralia elata*



John M. Randall, The Nature Conservancy,  
[www.bugwood.org](http://www.bugwood.org)

### Background:

Japanese angelica tree is native to Japan, Korea, Manchuria and far eastern Russia. It was first introduced in 1830 as an ornamental species, but has begun to spread to natural areas through dispersal by birds.

### Range:

This is a relatively new invasive species in Pennsylvania that is generating more attention as it's being found in the natural environment. Currently, it is only known to occur in southern PA, but due to its striking similarity to our native *Aralia spinosa*, it may often be overlooked.

### Description:

This is an upright deciduous shrub or tree that can reach heights of 40 feet, with a spreading, multi-stemmed form. Thick stems and the trunk have sharp prickles and spines. The leaves are bi- or tri-pinnately compound with pubescence underneath. Cream white flowers in large panicles appear in late summer and ripen into small purplish-black fruits.



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### Habitat:

Japanese Angelica tree may be found in wood edges, open areas, thickets and disturbed grounds, especially near urban areas. It is common in the Philadelphia, New York City and Long Island areas, and becoming increasingly frequent in the Piedmont region of northern Delaware.

### Biology and Spread:

Records of the North American native *Aralia spinosa* in Maryland and Delaware are now thought to have really been *Aralia elata*.

Japanese angelica tree acts aggressively by sprouting from root sprouts, forming large competitive thickets. It spreads into uninvaded areas through bird dispersal of the berries.

### Ecological Threat:

Where observed, this species acts more aggressively than the native *A. spinosa*, replacing other native vegetation and reducing biodiversity. In places, this species is displacing *A. spinosa* and hybridization between the two species may also be occurring.



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## How to Control this Species:

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Because this species is not widely spread throughout the United States, very little treatment information is available.

According to the New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team, Japanese angelica tree is best treated with herbicide, as it will prolifically sprout from only using mechanical treatments. Late season applications with glysophate on the foliage or triclopyr ester on cut stumps is recommended for best control.

## References:

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*Weed of the Week, Japanese angelica tree.*  
USDA Forest Service:

[http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive\\_plants/weeds/japanese-angelica-tree.pdf](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/japanese-angelica-tree.pdf)

*Mistaken Identity, Japanese angelica trees.* Delaware Department of Agriculture:  
[http://www.nybg.org/files/scientists/rnaczi/Mistaken\\_Identity\\_Final.pdf](http://www.nybg.org/files/scientists/rnaczi/Mistaken_Identity_Final.pdf)

## For More Information:

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DCNR Invasive Species Site:

<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/conservationscience/invasivespecies/index.htm>

*Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, National Park Service:*

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf>

*Invasive Plants Field and Reference Guide, U.S. Forest Service:*

[http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip\\_field\\_guide.pdf](http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip_field_guide.pdf)

## Look-A-Likes:

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The non-native Japanese angelica tree can be very difficult to distinguish from the native *A. spinosa* (devil's walking stick). Both species have spines covering most of the plant, compound leaves, white flowers, black berries, and can grow to 40 feet tall.

The structure of the inflorescence is the most obvious distinguishing characteristic between the two. On Japanese angelica tree, the flower is shorter, branching and with no central axis. On *A. spinosa*, the flower is longer with a distinct central axis.



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