

Chinese Tallow Is Invasive

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I looked up the word weed in the dictionary and got the following definition. "A plant considered undesirable, unattractive, or troublesome." The word weed is especially applied to an unwanted plant in a cultivated garden.

As a forester my garden is the forest, so when I think of a weed I think of plants like the Chinese tallow. The Chinese tallow and several other weedy exotic invasive plant species are steadily taking root in North Florida. This is a problem because they are a serious threat to the ecology of our area.

Once exotic plant species dominate an area, some native wildlife, including birds, insects, mammals and other animals either leave or die. This phenomenon is known as extirpation, and it happens because native wildlife is dependent upon native vegetation for food, shelter, and reproduction.

Plants like Chinese tallow, which were introduced from other parts of the world, have few natural enemies in this new environment. Unlike many other exotics which stay safely here in our yards, these are more aggressive species which have the ability to spread out into the wild and then out*compete our native species.

The Chinese tallow tree should be a target in our battle against exotic invasives. Botanically it is *Sapium sebiferum*. This exotic likes the conditions here. It is found thriving under both upland and wetland conditions, crowding out native plants.

I find Chinese tallow still growing in people's yards. Sometimes they are large trees. More often they are unwanted volunteers, growing in a hedgerow or at the edge of some woods. If you can destroy them while young (before they reach seed bearing age) the chances of control are much greater. If a tree reaches seed bearing age there can be real trouble because a mature Chinese tallow can produce 100,000 seeds, over 90% which are viable.

To control Chinese tallow, apply herbicides that contain triclopyr as their active ingredient. Examples of such herbicides are Brush-B-Gon or Brush Killer. These herbicides contain about 8% triclopyr. On larger trees these herbicides can be used full-strength to treat cut stumps and prevent the Chinese tallow tree from resprouting. Be sure to apply the material immediately after cutting the tree, though, before the sap dries and plugs the vascular system. On small Chinese tallow seedlings, these herbicides can be sprayed directly on the foliage.

Be sure to carefully follow all the directions and precautions on the pesticide label. If you don't want to bother with cutting large tallow trees so that you can apply the cut-stump treatment, but you still wish to kill the trees, some tree services and pest control companies can do a basal



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bark application for you with the herbicide Garlon 4E. You have to be licenced to purchase Garlon 4E which comes in 50 gallon drums.

Chinese tallow is currently the worst invasive exotic threat, but there are other non-native plant species of equal concern. The University of Florida maintains a web site containing twelve terrestrial and twenty-four wetland invasive plants. It also provides color photographs for help with identification and recommended control measures.

A look at this site reveals some surprises. In addition to the Chinese tallow, the list includes Chinaberry, camphor tree, Old World climbing fern, Japanese climbing fern, water hyacinth and torpedo Grass.

The list is sure to be updated as scientists and others continue to evaluate the effects of the different exotic and invasive plant species. To view and print the list, go to <http://aquat1.ifas.ufl.edu>.

For more information on garden plants that aren't invasive, visit the University of Florida IFAS Extension website for Leon County at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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