



Chinese Tallow Tree *Sapium sebiferum* (L.) Roxb.

Synonym: *Triadica sebifera*(L.) Small

Common Names: Chinese tallow-tree, chicken tree, Florida aspen, popcorn tree, vegetable tallow, white wax berry, candleberry

Native Origin: Native to Japan and to several provinces of central China; Introduced to America for making candles, soap, cloth dressing, and fuel from the seed tallow.

Description: A deciduous tree in the spurge family (Euphorbiaceae) that reaches approximately 50 feet in height and 3 feet in diameter at maturity. Its bark is reddish-brown with wide fissures and narrow ridges, and it often peels off vertically in narrow strips. The branches, which begin relatively low on the trunk, are typically long and drooping. The twigs are slender and waxy. Semicircular leaf scars become raised with age. The simple heart-shaped leaves are alternately whorled and dark-green with light-green mid- and lateral veins and turning yellow to red in fall. When freshly injured, the leaves exude a milky sap. The flowers are dangling yellowish-green 8-inch spikes which yield small clusters of three-lobed fruit that split to reveal popcorn-like seeds in fall and winter. It spreads by bird- and water-dispersed seeds and prolific surface root sprouts.



Habitat: It is adapted to a variety of disturbed sites and a wide range of soil conditions (alkaline, saline, or acidic soils). It invades low, swampy or sub-marshy places, shores of streams, ponds, lakes and impoundments, sometimes on floating islands; also in upland well-drained places, especially near human habitations stream banks. It does best in alluvial forests, on low alluvial plains, and on rich leaf-molds, preferring well-drained clay-peat soils.



Distribution: It has been reported in the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia. It is reported invasive in AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, TX, and VA.



Ecological Impacts: It can invade wild-land areas and swiftly replace natural communities with nearly mono-specific stands. It alters natural soil conditions, creating an inhospitable environment for many native species. In Texas, invasion by *S. sebiferum* marked a dramatic transformation of community structure from graminoids (grasses) and forbs to trees and shrubs as *S. sebiferum* shaded out herbaceous species. The milky, white sap may also be a skin irritant or diarrhetic in humans.

Control and Management:

- **Manual-** Mechanical control is not recommended because plants re-sprout vigorously from roots. Controlled burns can be effective during the growth season.
- **Chemical-** It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as triclopyr, imazapyr, hexazinone. There are many possible ways to apply such herbicides, e.g., on foliage, on cut stems, as an injection, or as a basal spray directed to the bark of uncut stems. Repeat applications may be necessary to reduce densities. Follow label and state requirements. Managers should evaluate the specific circumstances of each infestation, seek professional advice and guidance if necessary, and use the herbicide in a manner that is consistent with the product label and other state requirements.

References: www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/profiles/chtallow.shtml, www.invasive.org/eastern/eppc/SASE.html, <http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/esadocs/documnts/sapiseb.html>
Miller, James H. 2003. *Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests: a field guide for identification and control*. Gen. Tech. Rep. SRS-62. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station. P. 10-11, <http://edis.ifau.ufl.edu/AG148>, Godfrey, R.K. 1988. *Trees, Shrubs, and Woody Vines of Northern Florida and Adjacent Georgia and Alabama*. The University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA.