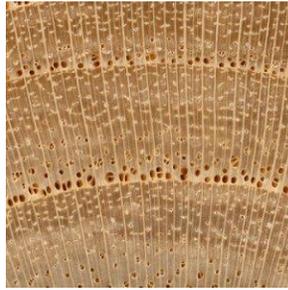


## Wood of The Month



### **Ailanthus** – *Ailanthus altissima*.

Don't be fooled by the common name of this wood which is, "Tree of Heaven". It is far from heavenly and some foresters and conservationists might argue that it's from 'the other place'. *Ailanthus* was introduced into this country in 1784 by William Hamilton as an experiment to feed silk worms as it had in China. However, it spreads quickly by both its abundant airborne seeds and shoots from the roots. It grows about anywhere it happens to sprout in poor soil as well as good. It grows rapidly and can overtake more beneficial trees crowding them out. It is considered a noxious weed in Australia, United States, New Zealand, and many countries in Europe. The Missouri Conservation Department discourages its planting as does the Missouri Botanical Garden. Another common name of *Ailanthus* is Stinking Chun or Stink Tree which is a characteristic easily used in its identification. Crushing the leaves or breaking a twig of the tree produces a foul undesirable odor. Even working the wood before it's completely dry that aroma is noticeable. Other common names include, Chinese sumac, paradise-tree, copal tree, and heavenwood.

The wood of *Ailanthus* is light yellow with darker streaks. It resembles ash in appearance only the growth rings are larger since it grows so quickly. It turns well, works easily, takes a nice finish and glues well. It is used mostly by the home woodworker and as fire wood. It has been used in cabinetry, decorative turnings, paper (pulpwood) and Chinese cooking appliances. It is not sold commercially but can be obtained from tree services or by the woodworker themselves. Although the tree itself is objectionable, the wood can be well used. Some caution might be taken because there have been reports of skin irritation reported. When drying, it does check and crack if dried too quickly and some reported that it warps badly, but others claim that there is no problem air drying. The piece that I had, did have several checks and cracks. Therefore, it is best to twice turn especially if not completely dry. It turns very similarly to ash and a little easier even. I did find that it was available at Cooks Woods, however it was fairly high priced.

In China it is used to treat tapeworm by using the powdered bark and also used to treat dysentery. It has been used in Europe for many things including treating mental illness.

You can read more about *Ailanthus* at; [Ailanthus on Wikipedia](#) and on [The Wood Database](#).

Written by – Mel Bryan