

TALLOW TREE

TRIADICA SEBIFERA

Tallow tree, or popcorn tree, *Triadica sebifera*, has been in our country since its inception, with none other than Ben Franklin touting the virtues of this invasive tree. Like many invasive plants, it is often sold in nurseries and planted as an ornamental for its bright red autumn foliage and striking spikes of small yellow flowers. Although many beekeepers esteem the tallow tree as a wonderful honey plant, there are many native alternatives that you can plant instead to support bees. Tallow tree can survive low-light conditions, establishing in healthy forests with little trouble. The fallen foliage of tallow tree produces allelopathic chemicals that inhibit the growth of other plants. With its rapid growth, tremendous output of seed and chemical warfare with other plants, tallow tree turns healthy forests into monocultures.

Identification

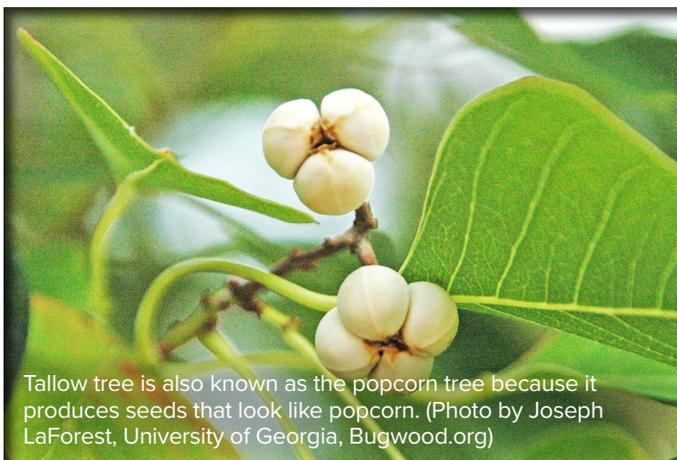
It is a deciduous tree reaching 60 feet in height at maturity. The leaves are deltoid-shaped with extended tips. Flowers are produced from April to June, and it produces drooping spikes about 20 cm (8 inches) long of small yellow flowers. In the fall its foliage turns bright red.

How it spreads

It is an early and prolific fruiter, producing thousands of seed within three years of establishment, and it can continue to bear seeds for up to 100 years. Birds transport some seeds, but water is the main way seeds are moved. Once a tallow tree is established along a stream, seeds will float downstream and colonize streambanks and riverbanks. Tallow tree is also a prodigious sprouter, producing suckers from cut stumps unless they are treated with an effective herbicide right after cutting.

Managing tallow tree

Don't plant tallow tree! Opt for a wonderful native, such as eastern redbud or red mulberry, which are also good bee trees! Cutting down tallow tree can result in stump sprouts and should be followed as soon as possible with an herbicide treatment applied to the fresh stump. Prescribed burns can exacerbate tallow tree infestations by opening up the canopy. If burning is used it should be followed by herbicide treatment.



Tallow tree is also known as the popcorn tree because it produces seeds that look like popcorn. (Photo by Joseph LaForest, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org)

Contact information

If you think you know of a tallow tree infestation, contact David Jenkins at the SC Forestry Commission at djenkins@scfc.gov or contact the Clemson Invasive Species Program at <https://www.clemson.edu/public/regulatory/plant-protection/invasive/>.

For information on how you can combat invasive plants in your community visit the South Carolina Exotic Pest Plant website at <https://www.se-eppc.org/southcarolina/> or send an email to southcarolinaeppc@gmail.com.