

Plant of the Week
Triadica sebifera
(*Sapium sebiferum*)
Chinese Tallow Wood



In Australia, the Chinese Tallow Wood (Tallow Tree), poses quite a conundrum. Is it friend or foe? This innocuous looking tree seems to be an excellent choice for home gardens. It doesn't grow too tall; it is tough and can survive hot summers, cold winters and prolonged drought. The rich colours, yellow, orange, red and purple, of its autumn foliage, are legendary. The main problem is that the Chinese Tallow Wood can be just TOO successful, as it seeds prolifically and has the potential to invade areas of natural bushland. It has been declared a "Noxious Weed" in many local government areas of north-eastern New South Wales and is also a problem in Queensland and in many states of the USA. In view of this, it is somewhat surprising to find it listed in a WA government web site as a recommended "Waterwise" plant for Perth (http://www.watercorporation.com.au/w/waterwise_plants).

Wū jiù

The Chinese Tallow Wood, 乌柏, is a forest tree from south-east Asia. It is widespread in China, Taiwan, Japan and Vietnam and is cultivated in parks and gardens throughout the world, for example in India, Europe, North America, Africa and Australia. The specific name "*sebifera*" means "bearing wax" and in China, seeds were harvested both for their white waxy coating which was used for soap, and for their oil, pressed from the seeds once the wax was removed. It has been suggested that In the future Tallow Wood may be used for the production of biodiesel, as it is considered to be the third most productive vegetable oil producing crop in the world, after algae and oil palm (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triadica_sebifera).



Map: modified from Missouri Botanical Garden

<http://www.tropicos.org/MapsCountry.aspx?maptype=4&lookupid=12805068>



Photography: A & K Downing

Alison Downing & Kevin Downing 7.02.2011

(唐爱森, 唐科文 - 2011年2月7日)

Downing Herbarium,
Department of Biological Sciences

