

## FACT SHEET FOR THE CHINESE TALLOW TREE PROJECT

### “HELP STOP THE POP”

Report sightings to: [www.HelpStopthePop.com](http://www.HelpStopthePop.com)

**What is this project about?** Last year, we asked the public to take part in step #1 of this process - the mapping and data collection stage to determine Mississippi’s needs for future popcorn tree control. This year, we are rolling out step #2 of the Help Stop the Pop campaign. Assistance is now available for municipalities to pursue Popcorn tree control. Please contact Misty Booth to apply: [mbooth@mfc.ms.gov](mailto:mbooth@mfc.ms.gov). In addition, the MFC is continuing to raise awareness of the detrimental impact of the popcorn tree in Mississippi. Popcorn trees may look harmless, but they are one of the top 10 worst invasive weeds in Mississippi. Popcorn trees spread like wildfire, overtaking native vegetation, damaging wildlife habitats, and destroying nature’s balance.

**What do these trees look like?** The leaves of popcorn trees have a distinct color which is usually light green. The base of the leaves can vary somewhat ranging from a rounded base to a heart-shaped base or even a point creating an overall shape similar to a diamond. It also has dangling yellow flowers and fruit that looks a little like popcorn.

**Why is the MFC mapping Chinese Tallow (popcorn) trees?** Determining the prominence of Chinese tallow (popcorn) trees in Mississippi will hopefully lead to additional funding for popcorn tree control.

**What is the public supposed to do?** Report sightings of the popcorn tree through the easy-to-use website map, including as much data as possible. We would also like to encourage private landowners to pursue Chinese tallow tree control on their property.

**How can individuals control popcorn trees on their property?** Cut down large trees with a chainsaw and treat outer two inches of cut surface of stump with undiluted glyphosate concentrate or a triclopyr-based product. Large saplings can be treated in a similar fashion, taking care to treat the entire cut surface. If seed capsules are present on cut limbs, collect and bag these and dispose of in heavy garbage bag so they do not spread. Monitor for seedlings and continue control as needed.

**What are cities supposed to do?** Contact Misty Booth to apply for assistance with popcorn trees: [mbooth@mfc.ms.gov](mailto:mbooth@mfc.ms.gov).

**Why are these trees bad?** Chinese tallow (popcorn) trees are non-native invasive species that grow and spread incredibly fast; they have the potential to overgrow entire forests, altering light availability for native species and changing the native ecosystem. This damages and reduces wildlife habitats and destroys food sources for animals. Prevention is an important control tactic for popcorn trees. Landowners are encouraged to remove fully grown trees and seedlings from their property. If possible, seedlings should be removed before they reach maturity.

**How do these trees hurt the ecosystem?** In the absence of proper land management practices, popcorn trees will out-compete (kill) native plant species. Transforming native habitats into monospecific (single species) forests that consist only of popcorn trees. Fallen leaves also contain toxins that create unfavorable soil conditions and alter light availability for native plant species. Popcorn trees are known to have toxic properties. Sheep and goats sometimes eat the leaves of popcorn trees without issue, but they are toxic to cattle.

More information on the Chinese tallow (popcorn) tree:

Scientific name: *Triadica sebifera*

Common names: Chinese tallow, popcorn tree

May also be referred to as: chicken tree, candleberry tree, vegetable tallow, white waxberry and Florida aspen.

- **Description:** Chinese tallow tree is a deciduous tree that may reach 60 feet in height and 3 feet in diameter. The tree has alternately whorled, diamond-shaped leaves with a pointed tip. The bark is light gray and fissured. Slender, drooping spikes up to 8 inches long appear from April to June. No petals are present but the sepals are yellowish-green. Three lobed capsules appear from August to January and release 3 white, wax-coated seeds resembling popcorn. A single, mature tree produces up to 100,000 seeds.
- **Biology & Spread:** Can reach reproductive age in as little as three years and prolifically produces seeds, which are readily transported by water and birds. Flowers mature March through May and fruit ripens August through November. Also propagates via cuttings, stumps, and roots.
- **Toxicity:** Ingestion of plant material causes gastrointestinal upset with nausea and vomiting. Contact with the plants can cause dermatitis. The milky sap in both the leaves and the berries is poisonous to animals. Sheep and goats have been known to eat the leaves of Chinese tallow, but the plant is toxic to cattle.
- **History:** Chinese tallow tree is native to China and Japan. It was introduced into the United States in the 1700s in South Carolina. It was distributed in the Gulf Coast in the 1900s by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in an attempt to establish a soap making industry.
- **U.S. Habitat:** Invades stream banks, riverbanks, and wet areas like ditches as well as upland sites. Thrives in both freshwater and saline soils. Shade tolerant, flood tolerant, and allelopathic. Increasing widely through ornamental plantings. Spreading by bird- and water-dispersed seeds and colonizing by prolific surface root sprouts.