

# JAPANESE ARALIA

## [*Aralia elata* (Miq.) Seem.]

### AREL8



Fig. 1

UGA 5391891

**Problem:** Native to Asia,<sup>1,2,3</sup> Japanese aralia (JA) was introduced to the United States as an ornamental<sup>3</sup> in 1830.<sup>1</sup> This rapidly growing<sup>4</sup> species is believed to be displacing the native devil's walkingstick (DWS) (*Aralia spinosa* L.) in the forest understory.<sup>3</sup> It is also possible that the dense foliage

suppresses growth of native plant species.<sup>4</sup>

**Habit:** Deciduous woody shrub or tree to 10 m (~33 ft) (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup>

**Reproduction:** Root suckers from base;<sup>4,5</sup> much less often by seed.<sup>5</sup>

**Leaves:** Alternate, bi- to tri-pinnately compound leaves<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 2), ~6 to 12 dm (2 to 4 ft) long;<sup>4</sup> pubescent beneath.<sup>1,2,5</sup> Veins of the leaflets run into the teeth.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

**Stems:** Stout, spiny stems;<sup>1,2</sup> prominent leaf scars<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 3).

**Flowers:** Late July through August;<sup>2,4</sup> small and white; inflorescence 3 to 6 dm (~1 to 2 ft) with central axis short or lacking<sup>2,3</sup> ("often wider than tall, with base usually surrounded by and even overtopped with foliage")<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 4).

**Fruits/Seeds:** August to September;<sup>2,3</sup> purple to black<sup>3,4,5</sup> berry-like drupe.<sup>2</sup>

**Habitat:** Wood edges, open areas, and thickets, especially



Fig. 2

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Fig. 3

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Fig. 4

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around urban areas;<sup>3</sup> Prefers moist, well-drained soils, but can grow in any soil type; sun to partial shade.<sup>4</sup>

**Similar Species:** JA is nearly identical to DWS and can be difficult to distinguish from one another. Both have spines on the stems, white flowers, purple to black fruits and can grow to similar heights. Veins of DWS leaflets do not run into the teeth (Fig. 5), whereas JA leaflet veins do run into the teeth<sup>1,2,3</sup> (Fig. 6). The inflorescence of DWS has a distinctive central axis<sup>2</sup> (“typically taller than wide, base usually elevated above foliage”)<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 7). Although vari-



Fig. 5

UGA 1342093



Fig. 6

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Fig. 7

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able, the leaflets of JA are usually sessile, while DWS has distinct petiolules.<sup>3</sup> Leaves of JA are pubescent beneath, while DWS are nearly glabrous or smooth beneath.<sup>1,2,4</sup>