



Fast Facts!

# Hercules Club

*Zanthoxylum clava-hercules*  
In the Pollinator Bed

- Native tree, very valuable to wildlife and is the only native host plant for giant swallowtail caterpillars.
- Blossoms are pollinators to bees and other insects and attract many varieties of birds.
- The tree is also described as a member of the ginseng family, rue family, and citrus family as it is a fragrant flowering plant that blooms in the early summer.
- It has various names: Devil's Walking Stick, Angelica Tree, Elder, Toothache Tree, Tickle-Tongue, Pepperwood, and Southern Prickly Ash, or Prickly Elder.
- The leaves are the largest of any temperate tree in the continental U.S. often three feet long and two feet wide.
- Averaging 10-20 feet in height, the tree gets its name from the odd spiny, warty projections on the bark of older trees, which is said to resemble the spiny club of Hercules. The leaves are pinnately compound with a citrus scent.
- Used by Native Americans to treat various ailments, though the roots are poisonous. The valuable fruit was used in many dishes and the lemony scented flowers used for hair decoration.
- Known for the numbness it produces when leaves or bark are chewed, like the effects of Novocain.
- Early settlers used it for toothaches, hence the name Toothache Tree. It was used to treat other ailments from sore throats to itching.
- The fruit is edible, with a lemon zest taste that first tingles, then numbs in the mouth, like the Szechuan peppers used in Chinese cuisine. The leaves have a similar but less intense taste and effect.
- Visit <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/all/aralia-spinosa/> for more information.
- Visit [www.plantnovanatives.org](http://www.plantnovanatives.org) for information about other native plants.