



Beware the tree of heaven! (*Ailanthus altissima*)

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Images in emergency medicine

Beware the tree of heaven! (*Ailanthus altissima*)

A 32-year-old tree surgeon presented to the emergency department with an 8-day history of a skin rash, which developed after he was exposed to the sap of the “tree of heaven” at work.

On examination he had a well-demarcated, urticarial, erythematous rash with multiple excoriations on both his forearms (see fig 1). He was discharged home on piriton, with a likely diagnosis of contact dermatitis, after discussion with the National Poisons Centre.

He then re-presented within 48 h with spreading of the rash to his genitals, lower abdomen and thighs. He remained systemically well. He was referred to the dermatologists who treated him with a reducing regime of steroids, fusidic cream and dermivate, and the rash resolved within 30 days.

The tree of heaven was brought to Britain from its native China in 1751, and is rapidly spreading throughout the UK (see fig 2.)

A recent case report describes how a patient presented with myocarditis after being exposed to the sap through ruptured blisters on his skin.¹

There is only one other documented case of contact dermatitis after exposure to the sap, and in that case the patient's rash was also successfully treated with topical steroids and antihistamines.²



Figure 1 Rash present on patient's forearms on initial presentation to the emergency department.



Figure 2 Tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)

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