

## Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group

January 5, 2026

Taryn LaScola-Miner  
Director, Crop & Pest Services  
MA Department of Agricultural Resources  
251 Causeway Street, Suite 500  
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Taryn,

The Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group (MIPAG) is writing to request that the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources add the species listed below to its regulated invasive plant list. As you know the first 66 species reviewed by MIPAG in 2002-2004 were listed as regulated in 2006 under new rules established in 2005 to ban or phase out the importation, propagation, and sale in the Commonwealth of more than 140 plants identified as either noxious and/or invasive in the Commonwealth. In December 2025 MIPAG evaluated and determined the following species to be invasive:

### Invasive

*Aralia elata* (Miq.) Seem. (Japanese angelica tree)

A conspicuous single- or multi-stemmed spiny tree to 20 to 40 ft with large pinnate leaves and massive many-flowered inflorescences. It can grow in a range of soil types, but prefers moist, well-drained soil and sun to partial shade. It produces small purple to black berries and also suckers from its base and spreads.

### Likely Invasive

*Symplocos paniculata* (Thunb.) Miq. (sapphire berry, Asiatic sweetleaf)

A perennial deciduous shrub or small tree to 10 ft with inconspicuous white flowers, leaves with deeply ridged veins, and many conspicuous shiny pea-sized blue berries. It can grow in a variety of conditions and can become dominant in the understory of undisturbed forests.

### Phase Out Period

MIPAG would also like to recommend that MDAR consider a phase out period for any plants that are in the horticultural trade. In 2006, all species assessed as invasive, potentially invasive, and likely invasive

were added to the prohibited plant list. In the original listing of species, the phase out period was three years for trees, two years for shrubs and one year for herbaceous plants.

More information on the process and designations can be found on our website:

[www.massnrc.org/mipag/](http://www.massnrc.org/mipag/).

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact me at [brian.keevan@mass.gov](mailto:brian.keevan@mass.gov)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Keevan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Brian Keevan  
MIPAG Chair

cc: Karen Lombard

# Species Information

*Aralia elata* (Miq.) Seem.

Syn. none

## TAXONOMY

**Family:** Araliaceae (Apiaceae)

**Summary:** *Aralia elata* (Miq.) Seem. (Apiaceae), Japanese angelica tree, is a conspicuous single- or multi-stemmed spiny tree to over 10 meters with large 3× pinnate leaves and massive many-flowered inflorescences.

“This invasive plant is an upright deciduous shrub or tree in the *Araliaceae* family that reaches a height of 20 to 40 feet and a width of 15 to 30 feet, with an irregular, spreading, multi-stemmed form. Coarse, thick stems have sharp prickles and prominent large leaf scars. The stems are covered in spines. Large, dark green, alternate leaves (2 to 4 feet long) are bi- or tri-pinnately compound. Leaves are pubescent beneath, with veins running to the ends of the serrations. In fall, leaves turn yellow to reddish purple and may drop early in season. The cream white flowers grow in large panicles and bloom in late summer (July through August). Inflorescence branches from the base. Small purple to black berries are eaten and distributed by wildlife. This invasive plant also suckers from its base and spreads. Its large seed production and rapid growth allow this tree to invade new areas quickly. This plant prefers sun to partial shade, meaning that it can invade open areas and forest edges. It can grow in a range of soil types but prefers moist, well-drained soil. Luxuriant foliage casts dense shade, which can shade out the native understory plants.”  
USDA Cooperative Extension Service (<https://invasive-species.extension.org/aralia-elata-japanese-angelica-tree/>) accessed 10/29/2024

### **Native Region or Range:**

*Aralia elata* is native to China, Korea and Japan (Bailey Hortorium 1976; World Flora Online 2025).

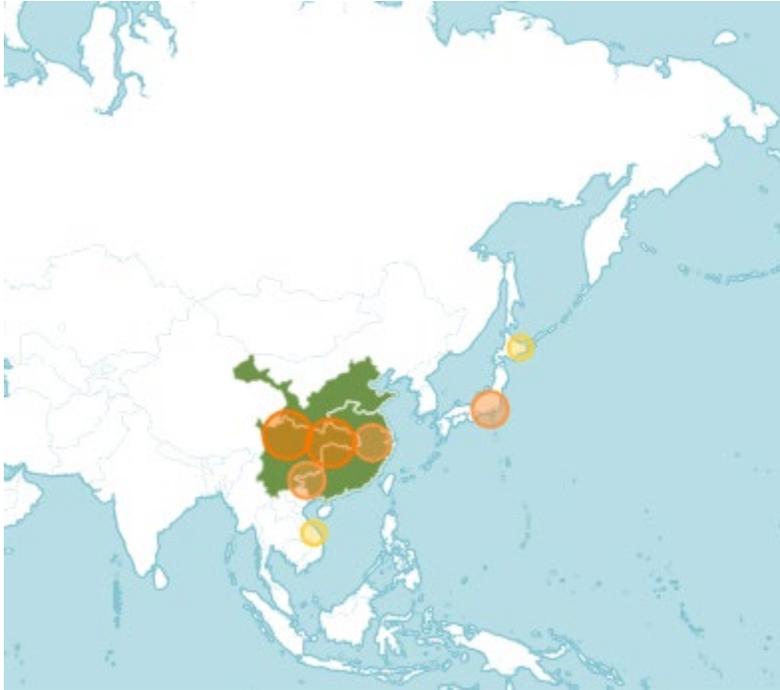


Figure 1. Native range of *Aralia elata* (World Flora Online 2025).

## HISTORY

The earliest record of *Aralia elata* in cultivation in Massachusetts, was at the Arnold Arboretum in 1874 (Arnold Arboretum 2020), and the earliest record of this species outside of cultivation was in 1933 (Norfolk County, Milton, *Kidder s.n.* [NEBC]). Cullina et al. (2011) list it as “present” in Barnstable, Norfolk and Worcester Counties, confirmed in Worcester County by Bertin and Rawinski (2012). It has also been collected in Hampden and Hampshire Counties in 1999 and 2002, respectively. *Aralia elata* was reported to have spread from cultivation at the New York Botanical Garden as early as 1881 (*Day s.n.*, 9 Sept 1881 [NY]) and is currently reported from New York (Werier 2017), Connecticut (Drejer 2014), New Hampshire (Hillsborough County, *Boufford & Wood 25292* [NEBC]) and Chittenden County Vermont (Gilman 2016), likely spread from cultivation on the University of Vermont campus (pers. comm. Weston Testo).

## BIOLOGY

**Life Form** – 20-40 ft semi-woody tree, deciduous, single- or multi-stemmed, monoecious.

**Naturalized** – Confirmed naturalization in Barnstable, Dukes, Essex, Franklin, Hampden, Hampshire, Middlesex, Norfolk, Plymouth (eradicated), Suffolk and Worcester Counties, in forested and open habitats (Standley 2020, Cullina et al. 2011, Bertin & Rawinski 2012, iNaturalist 2025, CNH 2025).

**Dispersal** – Plants produce thousands of small fleshy fruits (personal observation, numerous iNaturalist photos) that are readily dispersed by birds or other wildlife.

**Massachusetts habitats** – The majority of locations observed are in undisturbed forests, or in forests where canopy tree death has changed light regimes. In some locations, populations also occur in fields or wetlands, suggesting an ability to occupy a wide range of habitats across a moisture and shade gradient.

**Biological potential** – The species has high annual seed production, readily disperses away from source plants, and has a high growth rate. Plants also spread by rhizomes.

## REPORTED INVASIVENESS

This species, hardly inconspicuous, appears to readily spread from cultivation and can become abundant in disturbed forests. It is listed as an invasive (Swearingen and Barger 2016). *Aralia elata* is considered invasive in New York, where it is classified as “prohibited” (New York Department of Environmental Conservation 2014) and Maryland, where it was classified as “Tier 2” (Maryland Department of Agriculture 2020). It is also classified as “Rank 1” (severe threat) in Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources 2025) and “Prohibited” in Connecticut (Connecticut Invasive Plant Council 2025).

## DISTRIBUTION

### Massachusetts Counties

BE	FR	HS	HD	WO	MI	ES	SU	NO	BR	PL	BA	DU	NA
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

References: USDA Plants database, EDDMapS, iNaturalist, CNH Portal.

*Aralia elata* has apparently spread rapidly in Massachusetts. Sorrie and Somers (1991) did not list it in Massachusetts (although it is possible that some of the *Aralia spinosa* records reported therein may be *A. elata*), however Cullina et al. (2011) noted it in three counties (Worcester, Norfolk, and Barnstable). There appears to have been a significant increase in populations over the last 15 years. Currently there are 161 “research grade” observations posted on iNaturalist, which include 13 counties (all but Nantucket) and 56 municipalities, with multiple observations from some municipalities, primarily Newton and Boston (Figure 2).

Although *Aralia elata* is not listed in the Franklin County Flora (Bertin et al 2020), there is a single current iNaturalist record. It was listed as Rare in the Worcester County Flora (Bertin & Rawinski 2012), with only two sites reported, but is currently known from eight municipalities. In outreach to R. Bertin he commented that while he “suspects the species is not widespread across the state,...the time to list these species is before they have become so widespread that they are beyond control” (pers.comm to Karro Frost). It

was not listed in the Berkshire County Flora (Weatherbee 1996), but has now been found in three municipalities.

Herbarium records show the oldest collection in Massachusetts from Norfolk County, in 1933. These records show distribution from 1991 to 2020 in Barnstable, Dukes, Hampshire, Middlesex, Suffolk, and Worcester counties.

**Herbarium specimens** (CNH 2025): USA. Massachusetts. Barnstable Co., Falmouth, 10/31/1990, *Hunt s.n.*; 9/17/2011, *Polloni & Backus 0387*; *Polloni & Backus 0388*. Dukes Co., West Tisbury, 8/1/2017, *Palermo & Curtin 17-86*, 9/26/2021, *Palermo & Curtin 21-164*. Hampden Co., Holyoke, 5/24/1991, *Sorrie & Williams 4993*. Hampshire Co., Ware, Quabbin Reservation, 8/27/2003, *Zebryk 7878*. Middlesex Co., Natick, 8/19/2020, *Standley sn.*; Newton, 10/24/2006, *Kittredge 1261*. Norfolk Co., Milton, 9/28,1933, *Kidder sn.* Suffolk, Arnold Arboretum, 9/24/2008, *Mehrhoff 24427*. Worcester, Shrewsbury, 7/8/2008, *Bertin sn.*; Petersham, 9/14/2008, *Bertin 4629*.

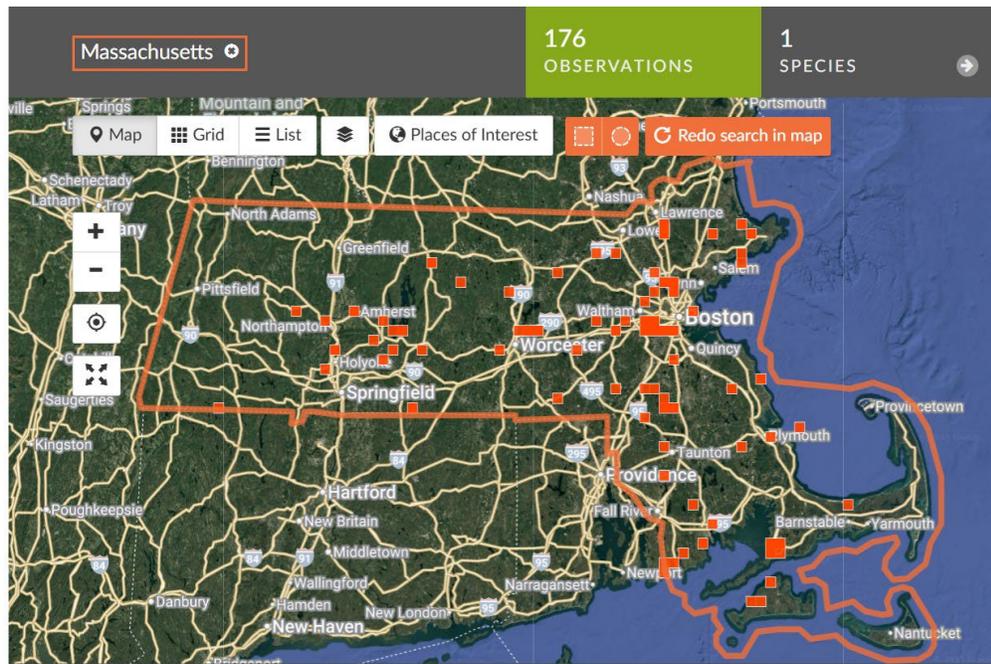


Figure 2: Research grade *Aralia elata* records in iNaturalist 11-11-25

## SPREAD & IMPACTS

*Aralia elata* has spread from horticulture into minimally managed habitats in North Carolina, Maryland, Delaware, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois in the northeastern US, and also in southern Ontario. It has become naturalized in 13 Massachusetts counties (iNaturalist 2025, CNH 2025, EDDMaps 2025, Standley 2022). EDDMaps and USDA mapping show the highest abundance in Massachusetts, Connecticut,

New York, New Jersey and New Jersey, with scattered occurrences in Vermont, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, North Carolina, Michigan, Wisconsin and Illinois.

Massachusetts data show rapid expansion of the range and abundance of *Aralia elata* from the 1990s (when it was not recognized as present) to the current day, where it is distributed throughout the state. Where established, it forms dense stands in minimally-managed forests. It exhibits rapid growth, high stem density, and large canopy area that shades and eliminates other understory growth. Plants spread by seed and also rhizomes.

In five years of observation at the Natick Town Forest, *Aralia elata* has spread from a single stand to three distinct stands, all in slightly disturbed forest, and has recently appeared in an open meadow. At Mass Audubon's Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary (IRWS) in Topsfield, one population was observed ca 2000; currently five separate stands are known. Since 2021, MassAudubon has been managing three of these stands by cutting and painting the stumps with Rodeo, targeting control before fall seed set. Flavio Sutti, MassAudubon Regional Ecologist, reports that they have not yet achieved full removal. At IRWS, the original patch was found along the edge of a field, where it spread into the adjacent forest and wetland after removal of Carolina hemlocks.

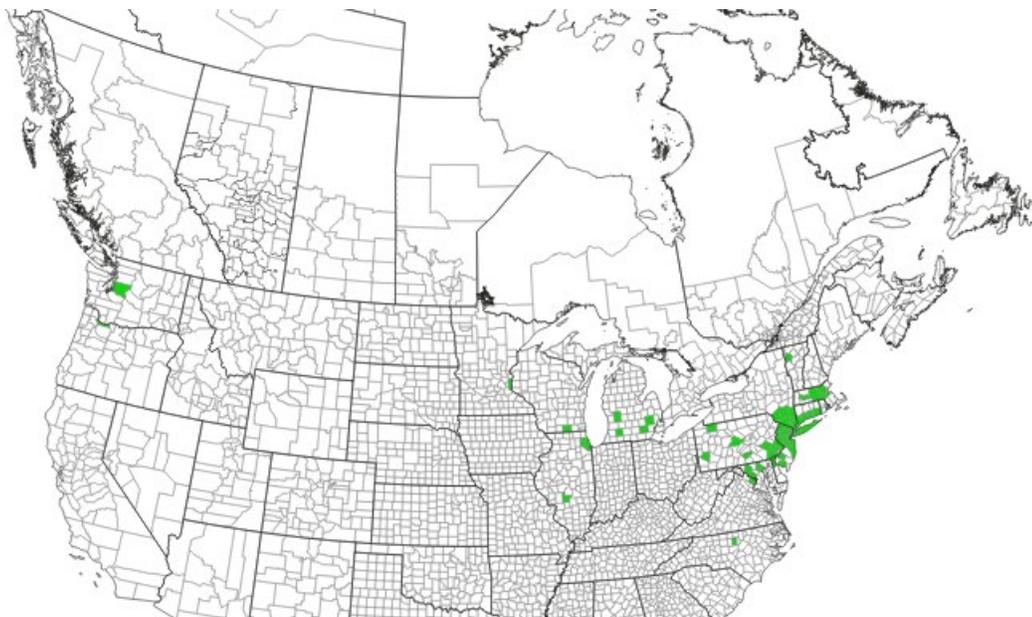


Figure 3. EDDMapS 2025.



Figure 4. Naturalized distribution of *Aralia elata*. World Flora Online 2025.

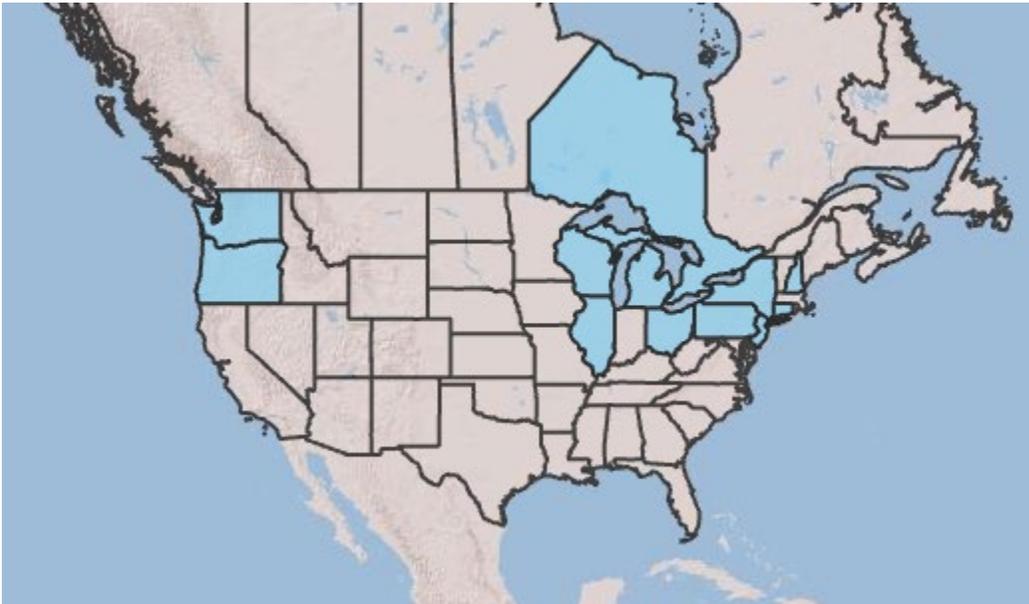


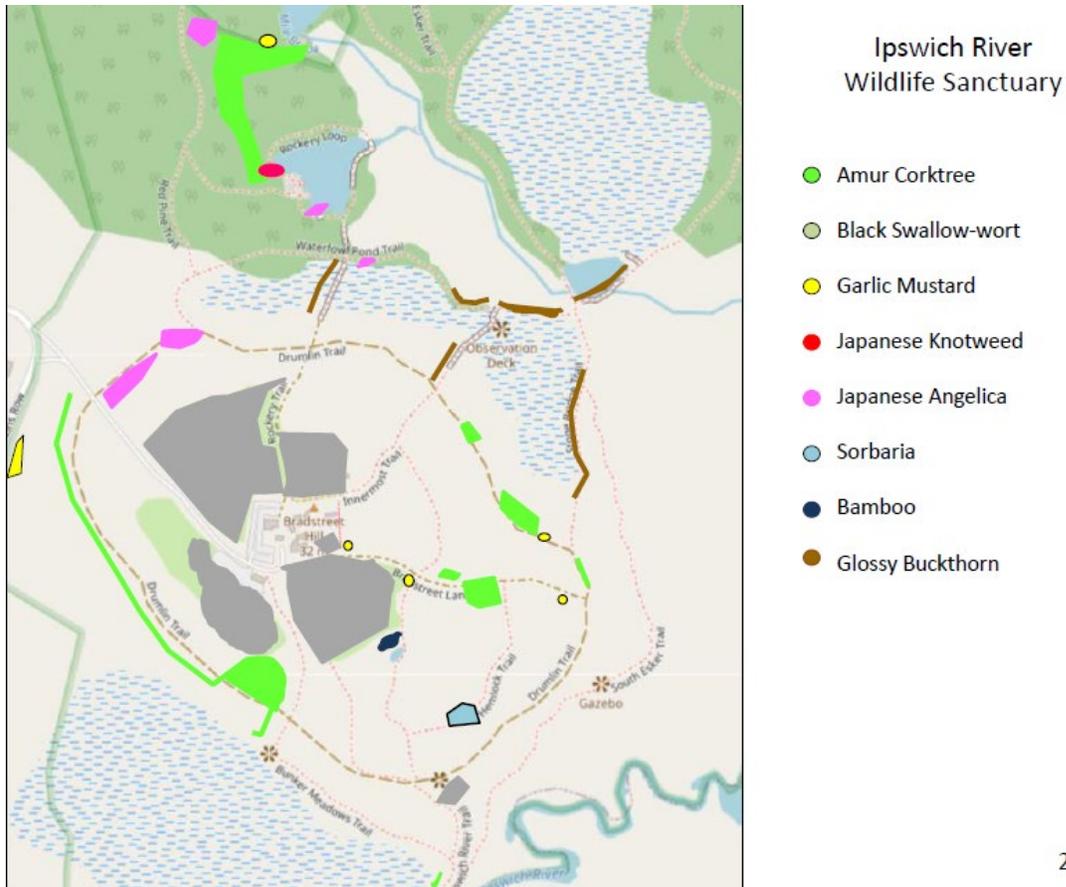
Figure 5. Naturalized distribution of *Aralia elata* in North America. USDA Plants Database.



Photograph by Chris Chalfant, New York City. iNaturalist.



Photograph by mattdemmon, Farmington Hills MI. iNaturalist.



2023

Source: Massachusetts Audubon Society

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**Information compiled by:** Lisa A. Standley, New England Botanical Society, April 2025.

*Aralia elata* (Miq.) Seem., Japanese Umbrella Tree

SPECIES: *Aralia elata* (Miq.) Seem.

STATUS: Invasive

**NON-NATIVE INVASIVE PLANT WORKSHEET**

**MASSACHUSETTS CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING NON-NATIVE PLANT SPECIES FOR INVASIVENESS**

The Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group (MIPAG) defines invasive plants as “non-native species that have spread into native or minimally managed plant systems in Massachusetts. These plants cause economic or environmental harm by developing self-sustaining populations and becoming dominant and/or disruptive to those systems.” As defined here, “species” includes all synonyms, subspecies, varieties, forms, and cultivars of that species, unless proven otherwise by a process of scientific evaluation.

The following criteria are being used to objectively evaluate and categorize plant species suspected of being, or with the potential to become, invasive in Massachusetts. They were originally developed in 2005 by the George Safford Torrey Herbarium at the University of Connecticut and a subcommittee of the Massachusetts Invasive Plant Group representing science, nursery, and conservation professionals. They were updated by MIPAG in 2022 to include climate change considerations and other minor clarifications.

The criteria enable the separation of plants into the following categories:

- *Invasive Plants* in Massachusetts
- *Likely Invasive Plants* in Massachusetts
- *Potentially Invasive Plants* in Massachusetts (species not currently known to be naturalized in Massachusetts, but that can be expected to become invasive within minimally managed habitats within the Commonwealth)

For a species to be included on the list of species determined to be **Invasive, Likely Invasive or Potentially Invasive** in Massachusetts, it must be substantiated by scientific investigation (including herbarium specimens, peer-reviewed papers, published records and other data available for public review) to meet specific criteria. The process of reviewing individual plant species for their invasiveness in Massachusetts is ongoing and may result in a change in status pending new data and further review.

**Tabular summary of criteria to be met**

	Criteria that must be met
Base criteria	1-4
Invasive	1-9
Likely Invasive	1-5, at least one of 6-9, at least one of 10-12

*Aralia elata* (Miq.) Seem., Japanese Umbrella Tree

Potentially Invasive	1-4 (not 5), 13-15
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**For a species to be designated as “INVASIVE,” “LIKELY INVASIVE” or “POTENTIALLY INVASIVE” it must meet certain base criteria (#1-4 below). The species must:**

1. Be nonindigenous to Massachusetts.

*Yes No*

*Aralia elata* is native to northeastern China, Korea and Japan (Bailey Hortorium 1976).

2. Have the biologic potential for rapid dispersion and establishment in minimally managed habitats

*Yes No*

The cream white flowers grow in large panicles and bloom in late summer (July through August). Inflorescence branches from the base. Small purple to black berries are eaten and distributed by wildlife. This invasive plant also suckers from its base and spreads. Its large seed production and rapid growth allow this tree to invade new areas quickly. This plant prefers sun to partial shade, meaning that it can invade open areas and forest edges. It can grow in a range of soil types but prefers moist, well-drained soil. Luxuriant foliage casts dense shade, which can shade out the native understory plants.” USDA Cooperative Extension Service (<https://invasive-species.extension.org/aralia-elata-japanese-angelica-tree/>) accessed 10/29/2024

3. Have the biologic potential for dispersing over spatial gaps away from the site of introduction.

*Yes No*

*Aralia elata* is bird-dispersed (small fleshy fruits) and readily disperses away from the initial site. Occurrences are widely distributed.

4. Have the biologic potential for existing in high numbers away from intensively managed artificial habitats

*Yes No*

*Aralia elata* has successfully established in large numbers in at least two undisturbed forested sites in Massachusetts. Where established, it forms dense stands in minimally-managed forests. It exhibits rapid growth, high stem density, and large canopy area that shades and eliminates other understory growth. Plants spread by seed and also rhizomes.

**If a species does not meet all four of the previous criteria, stop here. The species cannot be listed at this time. If a species meets all four, go on to #5.**

5. The species is naturalized in Massachusetts (persists without cultivation in Massachusetts)

*Yes No*

*Aralia elata* has become naturalized at several sites in Massachusetts. The earliest record of *Aralia elata* in cultivation in Massachusetts, at the Arnold Arboretum (Arnold Arboretum 2020), was in 1874, and the earliest record of this species outside of cultivation was in 1933 (Norfolk County, Milton, *Kidder s.n.* [NEBC]). Cullina et al. (2011) list it as present in Barnstable, Norfolk and Worcester Counties, confirmed in Worcester County by Bertin and Rawinski (2012). It has also been collected in Hampden and Hampshire Counties in 1999 and 2002, respectively. Confirmed naturalization in all Massachusetts counties except Nantucket, in forested habitats (Standley 2020, Cullina et al. 2011, Bertin & Rawinski 2012, iNaturalist 2025, CNH 2025).

**If a species meets Criteria 1-4 and Criterion 5, it may be considered “INVASIVE” or “LIKELY INVASIVE” in Massachusetts. Go to Criteria 6-9.**

**If it does not meet Criterion 5, it may be considered “POTENTIALLY INVASIVE” if it meets Criteria 13-15.**

6. The species is widespread in Massachusetts, or common in a region or habitat type(s) in the state.

*Yes No*

*Aralia elata* has become established in 13 Massachusetts counties.

7. The species has many occurrences in MA that have high numbers of individuals in minimally managed habitats.

*Yes No*

At least some of the occurrences have large numbers of individuals in undisturbed forested habitats.

8. The species is able to out-compete other species in the same natural plant community.

*Yes No*

*Aralia elata* (Miq.) Seem., Japanese Umbrella Tree

*Aralia elata* forms monotypic stands that exclude all other shrubs or trees.

9. The species has the potential for rapid growth, high seed or propagule production and dissemination, and establishment in natural plant communities.

*Yes No*

*Aralia elata* grows rapidly to a maximum height of over 10 meters, and produces thousands of small fleshy bird-dispersed fruits.

**If a species meets the initial five Criteria and Criteria 6-9 it may be considered an “INVASIVE” species in Massachusetts.**

**If a species meets the initial five Criteria, but does not meet all of Criteria 6-9 at this time, it may be considered a “LIKELY INVASIVE” species in Massachusetts if in addition it meets at least one of the following three Criteria (#10-12).**

10. The species has at least one occurrence in Massachusetts that has high numbers of individuals forming dense stands in minimally managed habitats.

*Yes No*

The populations in Natick and Topsfield form several dense large stands in un-managed forested and open habitat.

11. The species has the potential, based on its biology, colonization history outside its native range, and likelihood of range expansion or change in biologic potential from climate change predictions, to become invasive in Massachusetts.

*Yes No*

*Aralia elata* is recognized as an invasive in several other states (NY, CT, MD, PA), and is present in 13 Massachusetts counties, from a single documented occurrence in 1933 and no documented extant records in 1999 (Sorrie & Somers). It is likely to become much more widespread with warming climate conditions, and has the potential to become a more abundant threat to undisturbed deciduous forests.

12. The species is acknowledged to be invasive in nearby states, but its status in Massachusetts is unknown or unclear. This may result from lack of field experience with the species or from difficulty in species determination or taxonomy.

*Yes No*

*Aralia elata* is considered invasive in New York, where it is classified as “prohibited” and Maryland, where it was classified as “Tier 2”. It is also classified as “Rank 1” (severe threat) in Pennsylvania and “Prohibited” in Connecticut. It lacks official status in Massachusetts.

There is no difficulty in species identification, no ambiguity in taxonomy, and a large number of confirmed occurrences documented in iNaturalist and elsewhere.

**If the species meets the basic criteria for invasiveness (Criteria 1-4) but is not naturalized in Massachusetts (Criterion 5), the species may be considered “POTENTIALLY INVASIVE” in Massachusetts if it meets the following three criteria (#13-15):**

13. The species, if it becomes naturalized in Massachusetts, based on its biology and biologic potential, would pose an imminent threat to the biodiversity of Massachusetts **and**

Yes No *(note: include reference(s) and comments)*

14. Its naturalization in Massachusetts is anticipated, **and**

Yes No *(note: include reference(s) and comments)*

15. The species has a documented history of invasiveness in other areas outside its native range including expansion of range and/or change in biological potential from climate change predictions.

Yes No *(note: include reference(s) and comments)*

## References

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*Completed by:* Lisa A. Standley, Ph.D. Curator of Vascular Plants, New England Botanical Society. July 1, 2025.

*Decision by MIPAG and date: voted as Invasive December 10, 2025*

**DEFINITIONS\* TO ACCOMPANY  
“CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING NON-NATIVE PLANT SPECIES FOR INVASIVENESS IN  
MASSACHUSETTS”**

**Biologic potential** - The ability of a species to increase its number, either sexually and/or asexually.

**Invasive plants** - Non-native species that have spread into native or minimally managed plant systems in Massachusetts. These plants cause economic or environmental harm by developing self-sustaining populations and becoming dominant and/or disruptive to those systems. *As defined here, “species” includes all synonyms, subspecies, varieties, forms, and cultivars of that species unless proven otherwise by a process of scientific evaluation.*

## *Aralia elata* (Miq.) Seem., Japanese Umbrella Tree

**Indigenous species** - A species that occurs natively in Massachusetts. Indigenous species often have a pre-colonial presence (pre-1500) or have arrived in the region more recently without the aid of human intervention. Synonymous with native species.

**Intensively managed habitats** - Intensively managed habitats are habitats or land systems where management efforts and investments of time, money and labor occur frequently. Examples include manicured lawns, landscaped grounds, gardens, roadsides or agricultural lands for crops or livestock.

**Likely Invasive plants** - Non-native species that are naturalized in Massachusetts and meets some but not all criteria that would trigger an "Invasive plant" designation.

**Minimally managed habitats** - Minimally managed habitats are habitats where management efforts and investments of time, money and labor are infrequent or non-existent. These habitats may have been intensively managed for anthropogenic reasons at one time in their history. In some instances, management may be more intense, but management is done for conservation purposes and is primarily aimed at preserving elements of biological diversity such as imperiled species or critical natural communities. Minimally managed habitats are similar to "natural areas" but the distinction is made in order to remove bias, misconceptions or ambiguities that surround the term "natural area".

**Non-indigenous species** - A species that is not native or naturally occurring (based on its biology, phylogeny, distribution and current knowledge about the species) within Massachusetts. A species may be indigenous to North American but non-indigenous in Massachusetts. Synonymous with non-native species.

**Naturalized species** - A non-indigenous taxon that occurs without the aid and benefits of cultivation in Massachusetts. Further, it implies two biological points: it freely and regularly reproduces in the wild, sexually or asexually, and occurrences persist over time.

**Natural plant community** - A natural plant community is an association or assemblage of plant species that repeatedly occur together in re-occurring patterns in a specific type of habitat. This assemblage can be characterized by dominant species and biological properties. A natural plant community implies a minimally managed situation where all or most of the species that make up the assemblage are indigenous to the defined area.

**Occurrence** - Existing example of a species on the landscape.

**Potentially invasive plants** - Non-native species not currently known to be naturalized in Massachusetts, but that can be expected to become invasive within minimally managed habitats within the Commonwealth.

**Spatial gaps** - This term is used in reference to the ability of a species to disperse away from existing occurrences. The concept of crossing spatial gaps is used to distinguish those species that can disperse over discontinuities and become established elsewhere, from species that spread across a habitat only by continual, uninterrupted growth.

*\*There are no definitions for certain terms (e.g. widespread or high numbers) with the intent that discussion within MIPAG will be used to determine the outcome, given that we do not have perfect information.*