What does it look like?

• A small, deciduous tree up to 8m tall
• Leaflets are arranged into 9 to 15 (mostly 11) pairs along branches with one terminal leaf. The leaflets are 4–10cm long and 2–3cm wide. The leaflets are bright green but in autumn, change to a brilliant scarlet and crimson before they fall
• Small creamy-white flowers occur among the new leaves in spring and early summer
• The fruit when ripe is pale brown and papery in appearance and hangs on the tree through autumn and winter

How does it spread?

Birds which eat rhus fruit spread the seed in their droppings. Rhus can also be spread by movement of garden soil containing seed and as seed remains viable for many years, care should be taken when using soil previously associated with a rhus tree.

How does it affect the environment?

Rhus is closely related to North American poison ivy and poison oak. The allergic reaction is caused by a phenolic oily resin called toxicodendrol which has a complex active principle – urushiol. This resin will last for up to a year on shoes, tools or other items.

Reference and controls

General information on control methods, can be found in the most recent edition of the annual Noxious and Environmental Weed Control Handbook (found on the DPI website). The most appropriate weed control methods should always be checked with your Local Control Authority (local council or county council).

• WEEDeck from www.sainty.com.au
• www.dpi.nsw.gov.au
• www.sydneyweeds.org.au
• www.aabr.org.au

!!DANGER!!

The most severe impacts of rhus are the painful allergic reactions caused to people who come into contact with plant material, its sap, and even smoke made by burning the plant material. The sap is highly toxic and causes the worst reaction; however, contact with any part of the tree can result in the development of symptoms. All parts of the plant are poisonous and in highly sensitive people merely standing under a tree may be sufficient to produce a reaction.

Severe dermatitis can occur between 12 hours and 7 days after contact, often accompanied by localised swelling of the face, arms and legs. Symptoms can last 7 to 10 days. Chronic sufferers may have more extreme symptoms over a longer period of time.