

Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima* forma *erythrocarpa*) – Narrated by Peter Del Tredici

My name is Peter Del Tredici, I worked here at the Arboretum for 35 years, and retired in 2014. I am the Senior Research Scientist Emeritus.

1980? Well ... Wow. That's the year that I started at the Arboretum. I was the Assistant Plant Propagator working under Jack Alexander.

Well, this tree is funny. The Horticulturist at the time, his name was Gary Kohler, and he noticed that ... In the Arboretum, the plants are arranged according to their botanical family, and this particular family, the Simaroubaceae, had a particular location. The ailanthus is part of that family, and it wasn't in the collection. Yet it's one of the most common trees growing as a spontaneous plant in the northeast. He said, "We've got to have—for the sake of completeness of our collections—we need to have an ailanthus growing on the grounds. We shouldn't just have an ordinary one. I saw one with beautiful red fruits that was growing right along Interstate 95. You're in the propagation department, so why don't you go collect a plant of that?"

So I drove out there and parked along Route 95, right where it crosses the Charles River, and I climbed down over the guard rail and down the slope of the bank of the Charles River, and I found the tree that he was referring to. It did have beautiful, red fruit. I was there in the early fall when the fruit is at its most spectacular coloration, and I had a shovel and dug up half a dozen pieces of the plant and brought them back to the greenhouses and then put them in flats the following spring. They didn't all grow, but two or three of them grew, and we let them get established in the greenhouse. Once that happened, then we planted them out in the nursery and then they spent another two or three years in the nursery, and then we put them out on the grounds.