

Originally the African Tulip Tree was introduced as an ornamental garden or street tree in the tropics and sub tropical areas northern NSW and Queensland but has become one of our worst invasive weeds. The tree presents such a threat that has been **listed on the Global Invasive Species Database** and is considered to be one of the top 100 most invasive alien species in the world. In Queensland it is a class 3 weed and also said to be a “sleeper weed” in northern New South Wales. It invades abandoned agricultural land, roadsides, waterways, disturbs sites, waste areas, forest margins and disturbed rainforests in the tropics and sub tropics.

But possibly even more significantly these trees present a **severe danger to native stingless bees** as they are drawn to the flowering tree to collect pollen that is fatally toxic (see photo above). Whole colonies and hives have been wiped out in Northern NSW and other regions.

Anecdotally, the natural pollinators of the African Tulip are bats or birds and the tree has evolved a mechanism to protect its precious pollen from being stolen from the early arriving stingless bees. The tree is not fertile for some time after the pollen is released, the bats and birds are attracted at the right time by the copious release of nectar. The pollen is not only dangerous to stingless bees but also other insects and even birds (studies in Sth America). Removal of this tree is important as with the decline of honeybee populations worldwide stingless bees will assume a greater role in pollination in native habitats.

They are also a public liability as the flowers and pods pose a threat on walkways and other routes of travel as they become very slippery.



Botanical name: Spathodea capanulata
Common name: African Tulip Tree
Family: Bignoniaceae
Origin: tropical western Africa- Burundi, Cameroon,
Habit: Upright tree up to 25mtrs tall, with a spreading crown, with a slightly buttressed trunk.
Flowers: Showy orangey red tulip like flowers with yellowish crinkled margins borne in clusters at the tips of branches.
Leaves: Leaves are large and pinnate with 7-17 leaflets
Spreads: The tree reproduces from seed and suckers thus is very capable of creating dense colonies from a single plant.

They form dense stands in gullies and along streams crowding out native vegetation. Seeds are distributed in contaminated soil, along water ways and by animals.

Control: Young trees can be dug out or hand-pulled when soil is moist. Stumps of cut trees need to be treated with herbicide due to their ability to sucker. There are no herbicide products specifically registered for the control of African Tulip trees but several are allowed under the PER11463 permit. See DAF factsheet for herbicide table.

(Sources: Tweed Valley Tree services fact sheet <https://tweedvalleytreeservices.com.au/invasive-tree-species/african-tulip-tree/>; Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) Qld fact sheet African Tulip Tree https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/52846/IPA-African-Tulip-Tree-PP64.pdf; <http://bobthebeeman.com.au/african-tulip-tree-ebook.asp>)