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Football season is finally here, and autumn will soon follow, turning the trees shades of brilliant red and orange. The popcorn tree puts on a particularly spectacular color display. But some of our wetlands pay the price for this short display of color from this exotic nuisance plant.

Also known as the Chinese tallow or Florida aspen, *Sapium sebiferum* is native to China, where it has been cultivated for at least 14 centuries as a seed-oil crop. The tallow in its white seed coating has also been used for making candles and soaps. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Plant Guide, Benjamin Franklin introduced the Chinese Tallow to the U.S. in 1776. The tree was again introduced in the 1700s in Charleston, South Carolina. The USDA spread *Sapium sebiferum* throughout the Southeast in the early 1900s to establish a local soap industry. The tree has since spread throughout the U.S. as a popular ornamental plant, particularly for its fall foliage showing and has now naturalized in the southern coastal plain.

Popcorn trees share the common characteristics of other invasive species: quick growth, easy propagation, resistance to native pests, and, most importantly, invasion of disturbed land areas, especially disturbed wetlands. Once the plant has established in a disturbed wetland area, it is virtually impossible to eliminate. The exotic trees reproduce quickly, replacing native trees that provide preferred habitat and food for native animals, and shading out smaller vegetation, turning the once-diverse area into a monotypic stand of popcorn trees. The leaves and fruit produce a chemical that is toxic to fish.

You may think that the popcorn tree in your front yard is completely harmless. However, a mature tree can produce 100,000 seeds annually that are commonly spread by water, wind, and birds.

The best means of controlling popcorn trees is not to plant them at all. If you want to kill a popcorn tree, don't just cut it down; many small trees will regrow from the stump and roots. Herbicide must be applied to the fresh-cut stump to control re-growth. For more information on controlling *Sapium sebiferum*, contact your county Extension office.