Tree Species No. TTS5

Balanites aegyptiaca, Family Moraceae

B. aegyptyiaca *is a thorny bush or small tree that is semi deciduous, shedding some of its leaves in the dry season. It is a slow growing, persistent tree that can live for more than 100 years. The desert date is very drought resistant making it suited to many parts of dryland Africa. It has important pesticidal properties, a solution made from the fruit is lethal to snails that carry Bilharzia (Schistosomiasis) and water fleas that carry the Guinea worm disease.*

Synonyms: *Ximenia aegyptiaca.*

Common names: Desert date, myrobolan, heglig, arraronyit, baddan, adhto, tiborak, ol-ngoswa, soapberry tree.

Distribution: The desert date is native to the African woodlands along the southern boarder of the Sahara and is thought to have originated from the Nile Valley, it is common in the drier regions of northern Africa, but is now found in most of dryland Africa extending down to Katanga and Tanzania in the south. It is also common in Israel, the dryer parts of Pakistan, India and Arabia.

Ecology

Rainfall: 200-900 mm.

Temperature: Up to 40° C.

Altitude: 0-2000 m.

Soil type: Prefers dark clay soils but will tolerate sandy soils that are subject to periodic flooding. Waterlogging is not tolerated and it has some sensitivity to salinity.

Botany

Height: 10-12 m.

Diameter at breast height: 45 cm.

Flowers: In native areas the green-yellow flowers appear in April before the rainy season and are 1cm diameter. Occur individually or in bunches of five.

Fruit: The fruit are similar to that of the date palm, and typically ripen and fall in December and January. Each oblong fruit weighs approximately 10-15 g and forms from one or several fused carpels called a drupe.

Uses

Main: It is an important forage plant and is palatable to goats, sheep, cattle and especially camels who seek out the fresh young shoots. It also has important pesticidal properties, a solution from the fruit is lethal to the guinea worm and mollusca, and therefore can be used to treat drinking water. This solution can also kill fish which are then safe to eat.

It provides fuelwood and charcoal that produces very little smoke making it suitable for domestic use.

Others: All parts of the desert date are used by pharmaceutical companies in the production of steroids and the fruits are edible.

Yield: 10,000 pieces of fruit/tree/year.

Cultural instructions

The desert date can be grown from seed or from cuttings.

Pre-treatment: Soak the seeds in water for 24 hours at room temperature. Once removed from the fruit, the seeds can be stored for up to 1 year.

Germination: Germination rates are quite high and occurs in 1-4 weeks.

Planting out: If growing from seed, plant out at the end of the dry season. The seeds should be planted with the stem end down then cover with soil immediately to ensure germination.

Management: Seedlings should be protected from browsing for up to three years because of slow growth. Weed regularly to prevent light competition.

Other

Pests and diseases: The seeds are commonly attacked by borers.

Limitations: The desert date is slow growing, making it necessary to protect from animals for the first three years.

Produced by the Tropical Advisory Service, June 2000

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