

Dovyalis caffra

(Hook.f. & Harv.) Warb.

Salicaceae

+ Synonyms

Common Name: Kei Apple

General Information

Kei apple is a spiny, attractive, evergreen shrub or small tree growing up to 9 metres tall with a many-branched, dense crown[416].

The plant is widely grown in warm temperate to tropical gardens around the world as a hedge plant and for its edible fruit[303, 317].

Known Hazards

None known

Botanical References

[200](#), [308](#)



Range

Southern Africa - Zimbabwe, S. Africa.

Habitat

Occurs in open bush and wooded grassland, often in Acacia woodland and frequently associated with termite mounds[303]. Often found near rivers[308].

Properties

Edibility Rating	
Other Uses Rating	
Habit	Evergreen Shrub
Height	6.00 m
Growth Rate	Medium
Pollinators	Insects
Self-fertile	No
Cultivation Status	Cultivated, Wild

Cultivation Details

A plant mainly of the subtropics, succeeding at higher elevations in tropics, where it can be found at elevations up to 2,000 metres. It grows best in areas where annual daytime temperatures are within the range 20 - 28°C, but can tolerate 10 - 35°C[418]. Mature plants can be killed by temperatures of -7°C or lower, but young growth can be severely damaged at -1°C[418]. It prefers a mean annual rainfall in the range 900 - 1,100mm, but tolerates 700 - 1,300mm[418]. Grows best in a fertile, humus-rich, well-drained soil[200]. Succeeds in full sun or light shade[303]. Prefers a pH in the range 5.5 - 6.5, tolerating 5 - 7[418]. Established plants are drought resistant[200]. Tolerant of sea breezes, salt spray and saline soils[303, 317].

Trees have a moderate growth rate of 60 cm/year. They respond well to pruning[303].

Plants begin bearing when about 4 - 5 years old from seed[200].

Dioecious - both male and female plants must be grown if fruit is required. One male is sufficient for about 30 female plants[200].



Fruits

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Edible Uses

Fruit - raw or cooked. The fruit is juicy, aromatic and pleasantly acid when fully ripe[301]. Very acid raw, they can only be eaten with much sugar[310]. A flavour similar to apricots - they can be blotted to make them more desirable raw[200]. Sometimes eaten out of hand, but more commonly used in jams, jellies, marmalades etc[301]. The fruit pulp is rich in pectin and can be added to low-pectin fruits when making jams etc[301]. The bright yellow, spherical fruit is up to 4cm in diameter[200].

Medicinal

None known

Agroforestry Uses:

The plants have dense spiny shoots that make an impenetrable barrier[200, 303]. They are well suited to making hedges[200] so long as they are trimmed regularly[303].

Trees exhibit allelopathy and will inhibit the growth of other plants nearby[377].

Other Uses

If the fruit is soaked in water and allowed to ferment, the liquid drained off has herbicidal properties[303].

The wood is white, dense and heavy; usually too small to be of general use[303].

Propagation

Seed - no pre-treatment is required. If dried carefully and stored at 3°C, the seed can remain viable for several years[325]. Seeds are sown in flat seedling trays and covered with a layer of fine sand and kept moist. Under ideal conditions, germination occurs within 18 - 20 days. Seedlings transplant well[303, 325]

Layering[200].

Graft or shield-bud desirable varieties on to seedling rootstocks[200].

Hardwood cuttings. The cut tips should be treated with root-stimulating hormones before planting out into river sand[303]

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