

Tamarix aphylla

(L.) H.Karst.

Tamaricaceae

+ Synonyms

Common Name: Athel Tamarisk

General Information

Athel tamarisk is an upright, evergreen tree with drooping twigs and a dense spreading crown with several heavy large limbs; it usually grows 8 - 12 metres tall, but occasional specimens up to 18 metres are recorded. The bole can be 60 - 80cm in diameter[418].

The plant is harvested from the wild for food, medicine, tannins and timber which are used locally. It is sometimes grown to provide shelter near the coast and also as an ornamental. Quite an attractive ornamental tree, the thin branches and blue-green leaves give a feather-like appearance and drooping clusters of delicately coloured inflorescence are attractive, used to screen farm buildings and for street planting[303].

Known Hazards

None known

Botanical References

[200](#)




Range

Africa - drier areas from Mauritania and Senegal through N. Africa to Somalia and Kenya; Arabian Peninsula to Pakistan and India.

Habitat

Coastal scrubland in saline soils[307]. Wadis in hot desert areas in salty and non-salty habitats. Sandy soil and dunes; sebkha, canal and river banks, salty desert, fields; at elevations from 200 - 400 metres[328].

Properties

Weed Potential	Yes
Edibility Rating	
Medicinal Rating	
Other Uses Rating	
Habit	Evergreen Tree
Height	10.00 m
Growth Rate	Medium
Pollinators	Bees, Insects
Cultivation Status	Cultivated, Ornamental, Wild

Cultivation Details

A plant of the arid and semi-arid subtropics and tropics, where it is found at elevations up to 1,400 metres. It grows best in areas where annual daytime temperatures are within the range 27 - 40°C, but can tolerate 8 - 50°C[418]. When dormant, the plant can survive temperatures down to about -10°C, but young growth can be severely damaged at -1°C[418]. It prefers a mean annual rainfall in the range 300 - 400mm, but tolerates 200 - 500mm[418].

An easily grown plant, succeeding in most soils and tolerant of saline conditions[11]. Grows well in heavy clay soils as well as in sands and even shingle[182]. Usually found near the coast, it succeeds inland if given a fairly good deep loam and a sunny position[11, 200]. Tolerant of maritime winds and dry soils when grown near the coast[11], plants require a moister soil and shelter from cold drying winds when they are grown inland in non-saline soils because they use the soil salts that are found in saline soils to help them reduce transpiration[200]. It grows more vigorously on land subject to occasional inundation than on land which is never flooded[303]. Prefers a pH in the range 6.5 - 7.5, tolerating 6 - 8.5[418].

The plant escapes from cultivation and invades streambanks, sandbars, lake margins, wetlands, moist rangelands, and saline environments[413]. It can spread rapidly, producing jungle-like growth[418]. It can crowd out native riparian species, diminish early successional habitat, and reduce water tables and interferes with hydrologic process[413].

This species flowers on the current year's growth[200]. Any pruning is best carried out in spring, hedges are also best trimmed at this time[188]. Plants are tolerant of severe pruning, sprouting freely from old wood[K].

Plants produce a deep and extensive root system, ranging about 10 metres deep and 34 metres horizontally[303].

Plants in this genus are notably resistant to honey fungus[200].

Edible Uses

A sweet manna-like substance that forms on the twigs is used to adulterate cane sugar[177, 183]. It can also be eaten with porridge etc or mixed with water to make a refreshing drink[183].

Medicinal

The galls are astringent[240, 303]. They are used as a gargle[303].

The bark is astringent and bitter[240]. It is used for treating eczema and other skin diseases[303].

No Image.

Agroforestry Uses:

With its fast growth, deep and extensive root system and ability to resist burial by shifting sand, this species is highly valued for erosion control and sand dune stabilization. It is also planted to provide shelterbelts, windbreaks, shade and firebreaks[303, 418].

Very tolerant of maritime exposure, it makes a good shelter hedge in coastal gardens[229].

The dense salty litter produced by the tree prevents growth of other plants and does not burn[418]. Salt secreted from the foliage may cause salinization of the upper soil layers, even on non-saline soil[418].

Salt drip from the leaves kill all ground vegetation beneath the tree and litter from it is too salinized to burn thus strips of the species can be grown to stop wild fires and also hold the spread of fires along highways or railway lines caused by sparks or cigarettes[303].

Tamarisk is used as a plant indicator for soil type in agricultural surveys[303].

Other Uses

The bark is a source of tannins[418]. It is used as a mordant when dyeing[303].

Galls produced on the twigs and flowers (probably as a result of insect activity[K]) contain up to 55% tannin[223, 418].

The branches are used in basket making[303, 418].

The light-brown wood is close-grained, fairly hard, heavy, strong. It has a high shock resistance, splits readily when first cut and polishes well. It is used for making ploughs, wheels, carts, construction, tool handles, brush-backs, ornaments, carpentry, furniture, turnery and fruit boxes[303, 307, 418].

The wood has been used for fuel and for making charcoal[257, 418]. It burns reasonably well, though it is slow to catch fire[303]. The wood gives off an offensive odour if burnt green[303].

Propagation

Seed - sow in a nursery bed and only just cover the seed. When they are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and grow them on until large enough to plant out.

Cuttings of half-ripe wood. Very easy[200].

Cuttings of mature wood of the current seasons growth, 15 - 25cm long, planted outdoors in a nursery bed or straight into their permanent position. High percentage[11, 200].

Last update on 2014-09-18: Now containing 9881 plants.



Useful Tropical Plants Database 2014 by [Ken Fern](#), web interface by [Ajna Fern](#) with help from [Richard Morris](#).

The database and code is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#).