PLANT FACT SHEET

Phoenix dactylifera L.

GENUS *Phoenix* **FAMILY** Arecaceae

COMMON NAMES Date palm

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Cabbage, Sap, Palm heart, Flowers, Nuts-oil

The fruit is eaten fresh or dried. They are also used for jams and preserves.
The date stones can be fermented or roasted and used as a coffee substitute. They can be pressed for oil.
Dates are also pressed for juice.
The sap is used for jaggery and sugar.
The male flower can be eaten.
The pollen is eaten.

DESCRIPTION

A tall unbranched evergreen palm. It grows to 30 m high. The trunk can be 30-40 cm across. The trunk is covered with fibres and has the bases of old leaves along it. It produces suckers on the trunk and at the base. The fronds are grey-green. The leaves are 6-7 m long. The leaflets are 20-40 cm long. They are spaced in two irregular rows along each side of the stalk. Male and female flowers are produced on separate trees. The flowers spadices are yellow-brown. There are 1,000-1,500 fruit is a cluster. The fruit is small, brown and very sweet. It has one grooved seed. The fruit is 2.5-5 cm long. When ripe the fruit is dull yellow and the flesh soft. The skins of the fruit darken when dried. Strands of fruit have 25-35 dates. The fruit are edible.

HABITAT

They suit dry subtropical climates. It needs hot, dry arid climates while fruit mature. It can tolerate salty or brackish water. It can also grow in alkaline soils but with reduced yields. In cold temperate regions the palm grows but rarely flowers. It does best in areas with long dry summers and sufficient heat for fruit to ripen. It should not have rain during flowering and fruit set. For best production it needs 3,400 heat units above 10°C for fruit to fully mature. It can grow in arid places. It suits plant hardiness zones 9-12. In Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from seed. Seed take 4-5 months to germinate. They begin bearing 5-6 years after planting and reach full production by 15 years. A palm lasts about 80 years. Female plants need to be pollinated before they bear fruit. A single male is sufficient for 50 females. Taking suckers from good producing plants is a more reliable means of growing new plants. A well established palm can give 8-18 good suckers over a 6 year period.

These suckers should have some leaves cut off during transplanting. About 10% of plants should be male, for pollination. Selection of a good pollinator tree is important. Fruit thinning is often needed to give good sized fruit. Three to four bunches per tree are sufficient.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Trees take about 6 years before good production. There can be 45-70 kg of fruit per tree. Trees continue to bear for 50 years.

NOTES

There are 17 Phoenix species.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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