



## PLANT FACT SHEET



### Use with caution

This plant can be harmful if it is eaten raw, in large amounts or without the right preparation. Read the whole fact sheet before use.

# *Azadirachta indica* Juss.

GENUS *Azadirachta* FAMILY Meliaceae

COMMON NAMES Neem tree

## EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

**Edible parts:** Fruit, Leaves, Flowers, Sap, Vegetable, Seeds, Seeds - oil

The young leaves are cooked and eaten in India. They are eaten raw or fried along with other vegetables. They have a bitter taste. They are used in soups and curries.

The flowers are used to flavour food. They are fried in oil or ghee.

The pulp of the fully ripe fruit is eaten raw or cooked or used for drinks.

Oil from the seeds can be used for cooking after being refined.

The leaves and flowers are bitter unless cooked.

The sap from the branches is fermented into an alcoholic drink and drunk. Caution: Alcohol is a cause of cancer.

Caution: Alkaloids in the fruit and bark contain alkaloids that cause vomiting.

## DESCRIPTION

A medium sized tree. It grows to 5-18 m high. It has deep roots and normally keeps its leaves except when there is strong drought. The tree has a straight trunk and a rounded spreading crown. The bark is thick and grey. It is smooth when young and cracked when old. The leaves are alternate. The leaves are up to 35 cm long. They are made up of 7-17 leaflets. There is an odd number of leaflets. Each leaflet is 6-8 cm long. They are oblique with teeth along the edge. The flowers are small and white. Many flowers occur on branched stalks. The fruit are oval and smooth. They are 1.5 cm long by 1 cm wide. They are green when young but turn yellow or brown at maturity. There is one seed inside and it has a thick seed coat.

## HABITAT

A tropical plant. It occurs in most of Africa in both wet and dry areas. It is salt tolerant. It grows in the Sahel. It originally comes from India. They can stand temperatures up to 49°C. Temperatures below freezing kill the plant. In Africa trees mostly grow between 50 and 1500 m altitude. They do best in dry subtropical climates. It will grow on dry shallow soils but grows on most kinds of soils. It can grow in soils with pH of 5 but does best with pH of 6.2. It can grow in arid places. It suits hardiness zones 11-12.

## PRODUCTION

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### Cultivation

Trees can be grown from seed. Seed need to be fresh as they only remain viable for 1-2 weeks. Seeds planted in nurseries need to have roots pruned off regularly. Seedlings can be planted out after 14-18 weeks. A spacing of 5 x 10 m is suitable. Fruit fall naturally during the rainy season.

### Harvesting and Seed Production

It is a fast growing plant and can be 4-7 m in 3 years. A mature tree produces 20-50 kg of fruit. Trees can last for 100 years.

## NOTES

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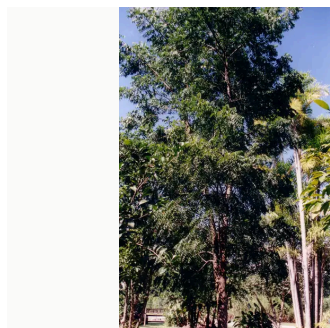
Leaves contain 15 % protein. There are 2 *Azadirachta* species. It is used in medicine and as an insect repellent. It has anticancer properties.

## PICTURES

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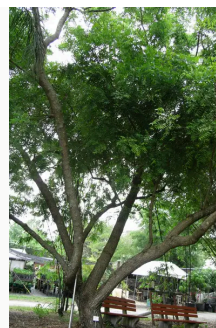
Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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