PLANT FACT SHEET

Alphitonia excelsa (Fenzl) Reissek ex Benth.

GENUS *Alphitonia* **FAMILY** Rhamnaceae

COMMON NAMES Soap tree, Leather jacket, Red Almond, Red Ash

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Leaves

The fruit have been reported as eaten when ripe but this needs to be checked.
CAUTION: It may contain poison. It needs special processing before eating.
The leaf tips are chewed. They contain saponin.

DESCRIPTION

A tree which may or may not lose its leaves during the year. It loses its leaves in cooler climates. It grows to 12-18 m tall and spreads to 5-10 m across. It can be 30 m tall. The stem is erect. The bark is grey and smooth in young plants but cracked along its length in older plants. The branches come out in layers. Young parts of the plant are covered with rusty hairs. The leaves are dark green above and glossy. They are paler underneath. They are broadly oval, smooth and 7-15 cm long by 4-6 cm wide. The leaf stalk is 2 cm long and generally softly hairy. The flowers are cream and very small. They occur in dense clusters near the ends of branches. The flowers are about 0.5 cm across and have a scent. The fruit are dull black berries. They are 1 cm across and corky or mealy in texture. They contain 3-5 glossy brown seeds. These are 5 mm long by 4 mm wide.

HABITAT

A tropical and subtropical plant. It grows best on medium well drained soils. It needs a sheltered position and in shade. It is drought and frost resistant. It will grow on a range of soils. It will grow in the tropical lowlands as well as in frosty places in Central Australia. It is a very hardy plant. It suits hardiness zones 9-10.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

The plants can be grown from seed. Fresh seed should be used. The seed need to be treated before sowing. They germinate poorly. Plants can also be grown from cuttings.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It is a quick growing plant. Fruit are ripe from October to January. (May to July). Ripe fruit can persist on the tree for a few months.

NOTES

There are (6) 20 Alphitonia species. The fruit are used as a fish poison.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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