PLANT FACT SHEET

Vernonia amygdalina Delile

GENUS *Vernonia* **FAMILY** Asteraceae

COMMON NAMES Bitter leaf, Tree vernonia

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Vegetable, Stems

The leaves are cooked and eaten as a vegetable. Often they are squeezed to reduce bitterness before being used in soups.
The finely cut and dried leaves are sold in markets.
The plant is burnt and the ash is used as salt for cooking purposes.

DESCRIPTION

A woody shrub. It has a single stem and grows up to 3 m tall. Sometimes it grows up to 10 m. The bark is pale grey and rough. The bark flakes off and the branches are brittle. The young branches are hairy but become smooth later. The leaves are oval and 20 cm by 5 cm. They taper at both ends. The leaves are dark green above and have soft pale hairs underneath. The edges of the leaves can have teeth. The leaf stalks are 3 cm long. Flowers are green or white and 4-6 mm across. They occur in dense branching flattened heads. These heads are 30 cm across. They produce a sweet smell in the evening.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It grows in subhumid wooded savannah and wetter highland areas in tropical Africa. It will grow in all kinds of soils. Humus rich soil gives better leaf production. It grows from sea level to 2,200 m above sea level. It can grow in arid places. Brisbane Botanical Gardens.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants can be grown from seed. Seed need to be collected in the evening. Seed float in the air. Seed are sown directly then plants thinned out later. Seed is best sown as fresh as possible. Seeds germinate in 8 days. Plants are better grown from cuttings. Plants for leaves should be pruned to reduce the height. Young woody cuttings are used and they need to be kept well watered till established. Plants can be spaced 12 cm apart. Plants can be cut back and will re-grow.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It is a medium to fast growing shrub. It can be chopped back and allowed to regrow. Plants start flowering in January in the northern hemisphere. (Nigeria). Plants continue to produce a harvest of leaves for about one year. First leaves can be harvested 6 weeks after planting. Young shoots 12-15 cm long are picked. There can be

about 19 harvests over a month period.

NOTES

There are about 1,000 Vernonia species. It has antioxidant properties.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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