PLANT FACT SHEET

Lepisanthes senegalensis (Juss. ex Poir.) Leenhouts

GENUS *Lepisanthes* **FAMILY** Sapindaceae

COMMON NAMES Soapberry tree, Cherry of Senegal

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit

CAUTION. The seeds are toxic. The leaves are also toxic.
The ripe fruit are eaten raw. The seeds are ejected.

DESCRIPTION

A shrub or tree. It grows 5 m tall. It can grow to 24 m high. The trunk can be 45 cm across. The branches often have small cracks along them. The bark is smooth and pale brown. The leaves are leathery. The leaves are compound. The leaves are divided 3-6 times. They are 30-60 cm long. There are 4-8 leaflets. They are 6-30 cm long by 3-10 cm wide. The lowest pair of leaflets are small and often fall off. The flowers are in groups and can be in the axils of leaves or hanging from the branches. The flowers are small and red. The flowers are 8-10 mm across. There are 4 or 5 white petals. The fruit are dark red to black berries. They are lobed. They are 2-3 cm long. There are 1 or 2 seeds. These are 14-19 mm long and grey-brown. The fruit are edible.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It grows in tropical Africa. It is an understorey tree. It grows in evergreen forests. In tropical Australia it grows in rainforest from sea level to 50 m altitude. It suits humid locations. In Borneo it grows in coastal and swamp forest up to 600 m above sea level. It can grow in sandy or clay soils. In Tanzania it grows from sea level to 1,800 m above sea level. It can often be on coral or lava rock near the sea. It often grows near rivers in arid areas.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants can be grown from fresh seeds.

Harvesting and Seed Production

In Tanzania fruit are collected from February to June. In India plants flower and fruit November to April.

NOTES

There are 24-40 Lepisanthes species. They are mostly in the tropics. The fruit are rich in Vitamin C.

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