PLANT FACT SHEET

Theobroma cacao L.

GENUS *Theobroma* **FAMILY** Malvaceae

COMMON NAMES Cacao

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Seeds, Seeds for chocolate, Herb, Flavouring, Spice, fruit

The seeds are eaten. The seeds are also processed and used for chocolate. The seeds are fermented for 6 days to remove the flesh then washed and dried.
The pulp in the pod is edible when ripe. It is used in jellies and sweets.

DESCRIPTION

A small evergreen tree. It grows to 15 m tall. Often it is pruned to be only 6 m tall. The trunk is straight for about 90-159 cm above the ground then a fan arrangement of branches develops. The leaves are large and simple. They are in a spiral arrangement around the branch. They are 17-30 cm long and hang down. They are red brown when young. The leaves are wider towards the pointed tip. The leaves are thin but leathery with prominent veins. The flowers are on short shoots like cushions on the trunk and woody branches. The flowers are small, yellow-white and about 1 cm across. A ribbed pod develops. The pods are large about 15-20 cm long by 10 cm across. They are green when young but become yellow or red. The pods have rows of seeds. There are 20-50 oval seeds. These are white at first then become red-brown as they ripen. There is a sweet pulp surrounding the seeds.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It is native from Mexico to Central America. It grows in lowland areas with a rainfall around 2,000 mm annually. It can grow in areas with rainfall between 1,200 and 7,000 mm. Plants do best in acid or neutral soil which is well drained. It has a long tap root which will not develop on rocky or hard soil. Cocoa does not do well on windy sites where there are sudden fluctuations of humidity. Shade trees help provide these conditions. It needs temperatures above 20°C. In PNG it mostly grows below 800 m above sea level. It suits hardiness zones 11-12. In Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from seed. Seed can be sown in pots in a nursery then transplanted or can be sown directly. Seedlings need shade. Plants can also be grown from cuttings. Cuttings from side branches are used. Cuttings are normally raised in a nursery. Seeds should be removed from the pod and dried but should not be stored for more than 3 months. Seeds germinate in 1 week. Plants should be spaced 3 m apart. Plants can be pruned. Flowers are pollinated by insects.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Some seedling varieties produce within 3-5 years. They continue to produce for 50 years. Fruits mature after 6 months. Seeds are fermented for 1 week and the temperature should not go above 50°C but once the temperature has come down to 35°C they can be sun dried. During drying the moisture content reduces from 50-60% to 6% over about one week.

NOTES

Also put in the family Byttneriaceae and the Sterculiaceae.

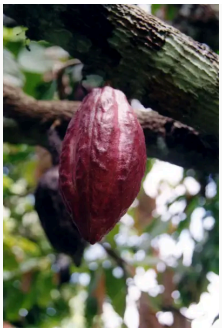
PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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