PLANT FACT SHEET

Thespesia garckeana (F. Hoffm.) Exell et Hillcoat

GENUS *Thespesia* **FAMILY** Malvaceae

COMMON NAMES Chewing gum tree

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: fruit, Bark

The whole fruit, except the seeds, is chewed like chewing gum. A sweet slime is produced. The seeds are not edible. The fruit need to be fully ripe. The hard outer layer is peeled off.
Dried fruit are used for jellies. They are cooked and eaten in large quantities during famines.
The fruit can be boiled and a little salt and dried and then stored for about 4 months.
The fruit can be used for jam and processed products.

DESCRIPTION

A bushy shrub or small evergreen tree. It can be 3-10 m high. The bark is brown and rough. The small branches have shaggy, woolly hairs. The leaves are alternate and simple. They have 3-5 lobes. They can be 20 cm long by 20 cm wide. There are hairs on both surfaces. The leaf stalk is 13 cm long. The flowers are yellow and turn orange with age. They have a maroon patch at the base of each petal. They are 6 cm across. They occur singly in the axils of leaves. The fruit is almost round and a woody capsule. It is 2.5-4 cm across. They have dense short hairs. They are divided into 5 sections. They are yellowish to brownish-green when mature. The fruit are edible.

HABITAT

It is a tropical plant. It grows in the lowlands. It grows in most types of woodland from sea level to 1700 m altitude in South Africa. It grows in savannah country. It grows in hot arid places. It grows in areas with an annual rainfall between 255-1,270 mm. In Zimbabwe it is mostly in areas with an annual rainfall between 750-900 mm per year. It can grow in arid places. It often grows in termite mounds. It grows in Miombo woodland in Africa.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants can be grown from seeds. It is best to remove the seed coat. Seeds germinate in 20-60 days. Seedling trays should not be kept too moist. Seedlings can be transplanted at the 3 leaf stage. Often seeds are sown directly in the field.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It is reasonably slow growing.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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