PLANT FACT SHEET

Aleurites moluccanus (L.) Willd.

GENUS *Aleurites* **FAMILY** Euphorbiaceae

COMMON NAMES Candle nut, Country walnut

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: seeds, Nuts, Vegetable, Oil

The nuts are normally roasted. The hard, oily nut is used for thickening in Asian dishes. They are used in a sauce for the greens eaten with rice.
CAUTION The nuts contain a moderately poisonous substance so should be cooked before eating.
The raw kernels of candle nut are poisonous. They are a strong purgative. Before eating they must be well cooked. Mostly the nuts are roasted in the fire until the shell is blackened and half burnt, then the kernels are taken out by cracking the shells. The nuts should probably only be eaten in moderate amounts. Because the kernels are high in oil, they can be burnt as candles. An edible oil can be extracted from the nuts.

DESCRIPTION

A large tree up to 40 m tall and 1 m through at the base. The bark is rough. The leaves are large and can be round, triangular or have several lobes. The leaves have a pale colour. The leaves are alternate, silvery green and crowded near the tips. Young leaves are hairy and sometimes lobed. The leaves, leaf stalks and flowers are all covered with short soft hairs. There are 2 distinct brown glands where the leaf blade and stalk join. The flowers are small and white and in large groups on the ends of branches. Male and female flowers are separate but on the same tree. The female flowers are on the end surrounded by small male flowers. The fruit is a large (4 to 5 cm across) green 2 lobed berry with 1 or 2 large (2.5 cm across) seeds with a hard corrugated shell. They do not open naturally to release the seeds.

HABITAT

It is a tropical tree. It mostly grows in the lowland rainforest but can be at up to 2000 m altitude. It suits drier climates but can grow in humid conditions. It does well on well drained sandy soil. It must have a temperature above 8°C. In the Pacific it usually grows between 0-700 m altitude in areas with a rainfall of 600-4,300 mm per year. It can grow in arid places. It suits hardiness zones 10-12.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

The trees grow wild but are transplanted. Often candle nut trees are just self sown, growing in the bush where the seeds fell. These small trees can be transplanted to a more suitable place if needed. Seeds are very hard shelled. To get seeds to start growing more quickly, the seed coat needs to be cracked. To do this a single layer of seeds are put on the ground covered with dry grass then burnt. Immediately after burning while the seeds are

still hot they are thrown into cold water, and then planted. This cracks the shells allowing more rapid germination. Without this it may take many months for this hard shell to break down and germination to commence. Trees can also be grown from cuttings.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The tree grows quickly. They can grow 0.5-1.5 m in a year. Yields of 30-45 kg of nuts can be produced on a tree in one year. Yields of 80 kg per tree are possible under good cultivation. Trees can start producing after one year.

NOTES

The black soot from the burnt seeds is used as a black paint for faces. There are 2-5 Aleurites species.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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