PLANT FACT SHEET

Sclerocarya birrea subsp. caffra (Sond.) Kokwaro

GENUS *Sclerocarya* **FAMILY** Anacardiaceae

COMMON NAMES Maroola plum

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Seeds, Nuts, Leaves

The fruit are eaten fresh or dried. They are also used to make a drink. The fruit can be used in a number of ways for adding to flour, porridge, making jams and jellies. The fruit is used to make marula wine or beer.
The seed kernels are eaten. These are eaten especially by children. The kernels are eaten as nuts or ground into powder. (They are hard to remove.)
The seed oil is edible.

DESCRIPTION

A deciduous tree. It grows 10-18 m tall. It has a thick trunk and light rounded crown. The trunk is straight and 1 m across. The branches are large. The twigs are sturdy with blunt tips. The bark is grey but turns black with age. It is thick and develops cracks and raised scales. This gives the trunk a mottled appearance. The inner bark is pink-red. The leaves are compound, alternate and crowded at the tips of branches. The leaves are 15-30 cm long. New leaves are tinged pink. Older leaves are bluish green and paler on the underside. There are 3-18 pairs of leaflets and one central leaflet. The leaflets are oval and stalked. They are 3-10 cm long and 1.3-4 cm wide. They are pointed at the tip. The midrib of the leaflets is more towards one side of the blade. The flowers have male and female flowers on the same or on different trees. Male flowers are pale green and hang downwards attracting insects. Female flowers occur on their own and are green-pink. Flowers are 5-8 mm across. Flower spikes are 10 cm long. The fruit is rounded and fleshy and 3.5 cm across. The skin is smooth, cream and spotted. The tough skin peels away from the sweet flesh. The flesh is white and fibrous. It has a hard thick shelled stone. There are 2-3 seeds inside. The fruit are edible. There are 3 subspecies.

HABITAT

It is a tropical tree occurring at medium and low altitudes up to 1,600 m. It grows in the lowlands. It occurs throughout Africa. It occurs in savannah and wooded grassland. It grows in Miombo woodland in Africa. It suits warm dry areas and sandy soils. Trees are susceptible to frost when young. It does best in hot, dry climates. It needs a permanent supply of moisture. It suits hardiness zones 10-12.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Trees can be grown from seeds or cuttings. Large woody cuttings will grow. These can be 2 m long and 10-15 cm across and planted 1 m deep. Seeds germinate moderately well taking 6 weeks to grow. Seed should be soaked in cold water for 24 hours before sowing. They should not be removed from the stones. Seeds can be stored for 3 months. Trees can be grafted.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Trees are slow growing. Trees lose their leaves from October to July in the Sahel. Fruit bruise easily, cannot be stored for more than a week and are difficult to transport. In Zimbabwe fruit ripen April to June. The fruit is collected after it falls.

NOTES

Fruit are rich in Vitamin C. 4 x oranges. Seeds are 22% protein. (The juice causes a hard to remove stain on clothes.) The kernels are high in protein and Vit C.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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