PLANT FACT SHEET

Canavalia gladiata (Jacq) DC.

GENUS *Canavalia* **FAMILY** Fabaceae

COMMON NAMES Sword bean

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Seeds, Leaves, Pods, Spice, Vegetable

Young pods are cooked and eaten.
Seeds can be cooked and eaten, but the water should be changed and they should be well boiled. They are also fermented. The seeds can be toasted and ground and used as a coffee substitute.
The leaves are blanched and eaten.
CAUTION The seeds can be poisonous due to hydrocyanic acid and saponin. Cooking will remove these.

DESCRIPTION

A climbing or sometimes bushy and upright bean plant. Mostly it is a climber. It can be 4 m long. The leaves have 3 large leaflets. The leaflets are oval and 7.5-20 cm long by 5-12 cm wide. The top of the leaf can narrow abruptly to a tip while the base can be rounded or broadly wedge shaped. The leaves are slightly hairy on both surfaces. The leaf stalk is 5-12 cm long. The flowers are in groups and are white. The flower cluster is 7-12 cm long and the flower cluster stalk 4-20 cm long. The individual flower stalks are 2 mm long. The pods are long (20-40 cm) and curved. Seeds are coloured red or pink. The hilum is dark brown and almost as long as the seed.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It requires a tropical climate. Temperatures of 20-30°C suit it well and it grows from sea level to about 1000 m altitude in equatorial zones. They are drought and salt resistant. They can grow on lowland tropical nutrient depleted soils. They can grow on soils with pH from 4.5-7.0. They can tolerate some shade. In Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

They are grown from seeds. Seeds germinate readily and the plant is relatively fast growing. Seeds can be sown 5 cm deep. Plants should be 60-70 cm apart. Climbing types need support. Often natural supports such as trees, walls and fences are used in backyard production. For large scale production 25-40 kg/ha of seed are needed.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Green seeds/pods are produced in 3-4 months and mature seeds in 5-10 months. Seed yields of 700-900 kg/ha are possible. Green pods are hand picked when 10-15 cm long before they swell and become fibrous.

NOTES

There are about 50 Canavalia species.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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