PLANT FACT SHEET

Diospyros mespiliformis Hochst. ex A. DC.

GENUS *Diospyros* **FAMILY** Ebenaceae

COMMON NAMES African ebony

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Seeds, Leaves, Vegetable

The ripe fruit are eaten fresh or dried. They are also made into a porridge. The fruit can be dried and stored.
The seeds are also edible.
The fruit are also used to make beer, or wine.
The fruit can be used for jam, and sweets.
The leaves are cooked and eaten.

DESCRIPTION

An evergreen tree. It grows up to 15-20 m tall. It can grow to 45 m tall in forests. It has a dense wide spreading round crown. The trunk sometimes has buttresses. Young branches have soft hairs. The bark is dark grey. The bark is smooth in young trees and becomes rough in older trees. The small twigs are pink. The leaves are simple. They are 4-17 cm long and 1.5-5.5 cm wide. The midrib is sunken on top and prominent underneath. The flowers occur as male and female flowers on separate trees. The male flowers occur in clusters and the female flowers occur singly. The fruit are round and 3 cm across. They have sweet edible pulp. The fruit are green and with hairs when young and become yellow or purple when ripe. They contain 4-6 seeds. The seeds are brown. They are oblong and flattened.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It can grow in the tropical lowlands. It occurs in tropical Africa south of the Sahara. It grows in the Sahel. It grows in semi arid woodland. In occurs where the mean temperatures are between 16°C and 27°C. In Tanzania it grows between 350-1250 m altitude. It is more common where rainfall is 500-1270 mm per year. It does best on heavy soils. It often grows near streams and freshwater. It can grow on termite mounds. It can grow in arid places. It grows in Miombo woodland in Africa.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from seed. Seeds take about one month to germinate. Seeds can be covered in boiling water and left to soak overnight before planting. They can also be grown by coppicing and by root suckers. They can be grown by cuttings. Seeds need plenty of moisture to germinate well. Fruit are often collected from the ground but can be picked from the tree.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Small plants are slow growing but they grow taller after a few months. Flowering occurs during the rainy season and fruiting during the dry season. It is about 6-8 months from flowering to mature fruit. Fruit mature faster in hot dry places.

NOTES

There are about 485 species of Diospyros mostly in the tropics. Chemical composition (Sudan sample, after Abdelmuti): Protein (crude) = 3.0% (dry). Fat = 0.9%)(dry). Fibre (crude) = 16.5% (dry). Ash = 4.5% (dry). Carbohydrate (soluble): Starch = 6.1% (dry). Sucrose = 0% (dry). D-Glucose = 7.61% (dry). F-Fructose = 9.9% (dry). Amino acids (g [16g N]-1): Aspartic acid = 5.7g. Threonine = 3.0g. Serine = 3.3g. Glutamic acid = 6.6g. Proline = 7.6g. Glycine = 4.0g. Alanine = 3.3g. Valine = 4.3g. Cysteine = 1.0g. Methionine = 1.0g. Isoleucine = 3.7g. Leucine = 5.0g. Tyrosine = 2.0g. Phenylalanine = 3.3g. Lysine = 4.0g. Histidine = 2.3g. Arginine = 4.0g. Minerals: Sulphur = 0.05% (dry). Phosphorus = 0.11% (dry). Magnesium = 0.08% (dry). Calcium = 0.37% (dry). Na = 0.01% (dry). K = 1.51% (dry). Zinc = 5 mg/kg-1 (dry). Iron = 192 mg/kg-1 (dry). Manganese = 5 kg/kg-1 (dry). Copper = 1 mg/kg-1 (dry).

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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