PLANT FACT SHEET

Senegalia senegal (L.) Britton

GENUS *Senegalia* **FAMILY** Fabaceae

COMMON NAMES Sudan Gum Arabic

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Seeds, Bark, Gum, Vegetable

The gum is eaten. It is highly nutritious. People eating 200 g a day can survive for several days.
Gum arabic has the important use in food products that it enables oil and water to mix. The gum has little taste. It is used in confectionary and chewing gum.
The soft inner bark is also chewed.
The seeds are eaten as a vegetable. They can be dried and stored.

DESCRIPTION

An evergreen shrub. It grows to 3-12 m high and 3 m across. The stem is erect. It is spiny and densely branched. The bark is waxy and smooth but then peels in yellow strips of a red base. The thorns are in threes. The central one is hooked and the two sides ones curve up and are brown to black. The leaves (phyllodes) occur one after the other along the branch and they are divided twice. The stalk is 7 cm long and it carries 3-6 pairs of side main leaflets. The flowers are yellow balls or spikes. They occur in stalked clusters in the angles where leaves join. The have a sweet smell. The pods are 10 cm long and 3 cm wide. They are thin and flat. They are yellow to light brown and papery. The veins are clear. They have few seeds.

HABITAT

It is a tropical plant. It occurs naturally in tropical Africa. It grows in the Sahel. It prefers deep sandy soils. It requires an open sunny position. It is drought and frost resistant. It grows in semi arid zones. It is very drought tolerant and can survive long dry seasons. It can grow in arid places. Its extensive side roots help bind the soil. In equatorial regions it grows from 600-1700 m altitude. It grows in areas with a rainfall of 25 to 35 mm. It can grow in arid places. It suits hardiness zones 10-12.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It is grown from seed. The seed need treatment to break the hard seed coat. This is by putting the seeds in water and soaking overnight then planting the seeds immediately. Dry seed can be stored if kept cool, dry and insect free.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It is slow growing. It can be pruned. Gum production is excellent when growing on poor soils. The gum can be collected by cutting the bark. It is collected about one month after cutting the bark. It produces the most gum in the dry season. Highest yields are obtained from trees over 6 years old.

NOTES

There are about 1,350 Acacia species. Over 1,000 occur in Australia. Also as Mimosaceae.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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