PLANT FACT SHEET

Parkinsonia aculeata L.

GENUS *Parkinsonia* **FAMILY** Fabaceae

COMMON NAMES Jerusalem thorn

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Seeds - coffee, Seeds, Flowers, Fruit, Leaves - spice

The immature seeds are eaten raw.
Ripe seeds are roasted and ground and used as a coffee substitute.
The seeds are also parched, sun dried and cooked and eaten.
The fruit pulp is sweet and edible.
The leaves are cooked as a spice and the flowers are eaten raw.

DESCRIPTION

A shrub or small tree. It grows 3-4 m tall but can be 10 m tall. It can have one or several stems. The bark is smooth and green. The smooth branches are zigzagged. It is spiny and has drooping branches. The spines are at the base of each leaf. The leaves are long and thin. They are compound with unusual leaflets. They are small and widely spaced along the flattened leaf stalk. There is a spine at the end. The flowers are yellow and have one red-brown petal. They have a scent. The fruit are straight pods 10 cm long. These are constricted between the seeds. The pods turn brown when ripe. The seeds are oblong and dark brown.

HABITAT

A tropical and subtropical plant. It is native from Mexico to Honduras. It grows in warm subtropical and tropical places. It suits semi-arid places. It grows in areas with a rainfall between 200-1,000 mm per year. It grows along drainage lines and on flood plains. It grows in dry lowland grassland and coastal regions. It grows in the Sahel. In East Africa it grows from sea level to 1,400 m above sea level. It can grow in alkaline and salty soils. It can grow in arid places. It suits hardiness zones 9-11.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from seed. Seeds can be put in boiling water then allowed to cool down before planting. Seed can spread in flood waters. The seed are best sown fresh. Seedlings can be transplanted after 6-10 weeks. Plants can also be grown from root or stem cuttings and air-layering. Plants can be used to form hedges. They can be cut back and will re-grow.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It grows quickly.

NOTES

There are (2-3) 12-29 Parkinsonia species. The thorns make it a weed problem.
Also as Caesalpinaceae.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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