PLANT FACT SHEET

Thespesia populnea (L.) Solander ex Correa

GENUS *Thespesia* **FAMILY** Malvaceae

COMMON NAMES Pacific rosewood, Coastal Hibiscus

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Flowers, Fruit, Vegetable

The young leaves and young flower buds are eaten raw, cooked or fried in butter. They are used in soups. The fruit are eaten preserved.

DESCRIPTION

An evergreen tree. It grows to 5-10 m high and spreads 2 m across. The stem is erect and branching. It has a compact crown. The outer bark is grey-brown. It is cracked along its length and scaly. The leaves are bluish green and broadly heart shaped. They are 5-15 cm long and 5-10 cm wide and taper to a tip. The leaves are thin and have very small scales on both surfaces. They are on long stalks. The leaves have nectar nearing zones at the bases of the midrib. The flowers are a sulphur-yellow. They have 5 petals and a purple throat. They occur singly. They are bell shaped. Flowers are 5-8 cm across. The flowers are somewhat like Hibiscus. The fruit is a round capsule 2.5 cm across. Sometimes it splits open into 5 valves revealing silky brown seeds. They are oval or triangle shaped and about 9 mm across.

HABITAT

It is a tropical plant. It does best in light well-drained soils. It needs an open sunny position. It is damaged by drought and frost. It can tolerate salt spray. It needs a temperature above 13-15°C. They suit the coastal tropics. It does best with a temperature of 20-26°C. It grows along beaches and tidal forests in India. In China it grows on the sea coast in sunny places. It grows up to 150 m above sea level. It suits hardiness zones 10-12.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from seed. The seed can be dried and stored for short periods but it is best to sow fresh seed. Seeds can germinate in 8 days but may take a few weeks. They can also be grown from cuttings. Seeds can float in sea-water and stay alive for months.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It is fast growing. It flowers in 2-3 years.

NOTES

There are 17 Thespesia species.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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