PLANT FACT SHEET

Use with caution

This plant can be harmful if it is eaten raw, in large amounts or without the right preparation. Read the whole fact sheet before use.

Food Plants International: Fruit - Caution

Phytolacca dioica (L.) Moq.

GENUS *Phytolacca* **FAMILY** Phytolaccaceae

COMMON NAMES Ombu tree

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Leaves

CAUTION: The fruit are poisonous. The attractive smell encourages children to eat them with poisonous results.
The young leaves and shoots are cooked and eaten as a vegetable.
The fruit are made into jellies and jams. They are also used to give red colour to wines.

DESCRIPTION

A large tree. It is evergreen. It grows to 15-20 m high. The crown is dense and spreading. The trunk can be 2 m across. It is swollen at the base. The roots come to the surface and put out suckers. The leaves are green and narrowly oval and taper to the tip. They are simple and 10 cm long. The leaf stalks are narrow. Male and female flowers are separate on separate plants. The flowers are along branched stalks and often hang downwards. These are 10 cm long. The male flowers have 20-30 stamens. The fruit are fleshy berries. They are yellow and have 7-10 cells. The fruit are 1.2 cm across.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It can tolerate salty air near sea-sides. It needs mild climates and is damaged by severe frosts. It is drought tolerant. It can grow in an average, well-drained soil. It needs full sun. In Argentina it grows from sea level to 1,500 m above sea level. In Melbourne Botanical Gardens. It suits hardiness zones 10-11.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from seed. The ripe fruit are harvested from the tree and allowed to decompose for a few days before removing the seed. The seeds are washed out in running water and dried lightly. Seed can be stored for about 1 year. Fresh seed should be planted. They germinate in 8-16 days. Seedlings can be transplanted into the field after 4 months. Trees can be grown from cuttings.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The tree grows rapidly. They can be 4-5 m tall in 2 years.

NOTES

There are 25 Phytolacca species.

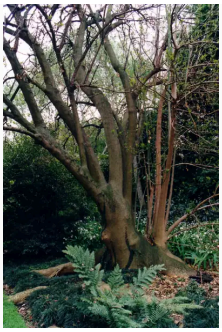
PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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ONLINE FACT SHEET https://www.echocommunity.org/en/resources/c6033597-3635-4168-9558-78bf8ef33d60