

CALLIANDRA

Calliandra

Calliandra calothyrsus

Leguminosae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

Calliandra is a leguminous shrub that is fast growing on poor soils. It efficiently converts atmospheric nitrogen into a form used by plants for growth. It grows as a low, many-branched shrub which is ready to be cut for firewood in one year and again in 6 months. The species is native to the Americas, originating in Central America and Mexico. Its cultivation has spread to both Africa and Asia.

Uses

Calliandra was first used as a shade plant in coffee plantations and has also become useful for erosion control on sloping land. Its fresh leaves are cut and carried as a high protein fodder for dairy cows, goats and sheep. Dried leaves are fed to chickens. Because the leaves contain a high amount of tannin, it should only be used as 30-50% of an animal's diet. Soil for planting Calliandra does not need inoculation by rhizobia bacteria in order for its roots to fix nitrogen. It quickly forms a dense canopy of leaves and drops its nitrogen-rich leaf litter as mulch. It responds well to coppicing at about 0.5 m (1.5 in) over a period of many years. It is a beneficial tree to use in the hedgerow of an alley-cropping system as it not only enriches and stabilizes the soil but can be coppiced and sold for firewood or made into charcoal. It flowers and produces seed year-round making it a very good nectar source for bees.

Cultivation

- Elevation: 0-1850 m (6000 ft)
- Rainfall: 1000 to 4000 mm, (39-157 in), can tolerate 3-6 months of drought but not waterlogged soil
- Soil Types: prefers acid, alluvial, clay and sandy loam
- Temperature Range: 22-28° C (72-82° F), sensitive to frosts

Harvesting and Seed Production

The tree is easily propagated by seed or stump cuttings. Spacing of seedlings is dependent on the purpose for cultivation. Dry seed pods will break open while still on the tree and shed their seeds which can be collected on sheets spread under the tree. Seeds will remain viable under refrigeration for 5 years but stored in a cool, dry area, they should be planted as soon as possible.

Pests and Diseases

Calliandra is not plagued by any serious pests. In some areas seed production is low due to a beetle that eats flowers and flower buds. If stems are cut too low or are not cut cleanly, stumps can become susceptible to fungal attack. Because of its ease of germination, there is a possibility that Calliandra can become a weed unless grazed.

Cooking and Nutrition

This species is not used for human consumption.

References

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