

TAMARIND

Tamarindus indica

Fabaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

Tamarind is an attractive, evergreen, nitrogen fixing tree, growing to 30 m in height, and best adapted to semi-arid conditions. The sweet-tart pulp from the pod is eaten fresh, used as an ingredient in cooking, or made into a refreshing drink. Tamarind wood is used for lumber, firewood, and high quality charcoal.

Origin

Thought to be native of Africa, but has been cultivated since prehistoric times in India. Extensively cultivated in tropical areas of the world.

Uses

The soft fruit pulp taken from the pods is used liberally in Indian cooking and there is no home in South India without everyday use of Tamarind pulp. The tender pods are used as vegetables and for making pickles. Livestock are fed with the leaves, which have high animal food nutrients. The seeds are roasted and given to animals. Tamarind trees make good timber in the commercial market; can be used as good firewood and for making high quality charcoal. The white of the seed, crushed and boiled yields a paste that is a good weather proofing material used especially against seawater and salt breeze corrosion.

Cultivation

Tamarind is well adapted to semi-arid tropical conditions, although it does well in many humid tropical areas of the world with seasonally high rainfall. Young trees are very susceptible to frost but mature trees will withstand -3° C (28° F) without serious injury. It grows well in deep, well-drained soils that are slightly acid. Usual propagation is by seed, which germinates within a week and can retain their viability for several months if kept dry. Seed should be planted 1 cm (0.4 in) deep in containers of suitable potting media. Young trees should be planted in holes larger than necessary to accommodate the root system. They should be set slightly higher than the level grown in containers to allow for subsequent settling of the soil. Spacing of trees should be 6 m -10 m (20 ft- 35 ft) in orchard setting. Solitary trees will exceed 5 m (15 ft) in diameter. Young trees are pruned to allow 3 - 5 well-spaced branches to develop into the main scaffolding structure of the tree. Tamarind can withstand drought quite well, young trees require adequate soil moisture to become well-established, mature trees should do well without supplemental irrigation.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Seedlings should begin to produce fruit in 6 - 8 years, while vegetatively propagated trees should bear in half that time. Mature trees are capable of producing 160 kg (365 lbs) of fruit a year. Fruit matures in late spring to early summer and may persist on the tree for several months. Yield is good in alternative years and the yielding stage lasts for over 80 years. A heap of pods will have 55% pulp and 34% seeds. One kilogram (2.2 lbs) of fruits will have about 1800 seeds.

Pests and Diseases

The Tamarind tree is seldom affected by pests and diseases. However, ripe fruit in humid climates is readily attacked by beetles and fungi, so mature fruit should be harvested and stored.

Cooking and Nutrition

Tamarind may be eaten fresh, but it is most commonly used with sugar and water in the American tropics to prepare a cooling drink or refresco. The pulp is also used to flavor preserves and chutneys, to make meat sauces and to pickle fish. It is a mild laxative and is used as such in some countries. Candy can be made by mixing the pulp with dry sugar and molding it into desired shapes. As the leaves of the Tamarind contain 10% fiber, intake of leaf in any form helps people suffering from cholesterol.

References

Morton, J. 1987. Tamarind. p. 115-121. In: Fruits of warm climates. Julia F. Morton, Miami, FL.