

BUFFALO THORN

Jujube, Catch Thorn, Kankhande

Ziziphus abyssinica

Rhamnaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

This *Ziziphus* species is indigenous to Malawi, Kenya, Mozambique and South Africa. It is found growing wild in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and other east African countries. It is a thorny shrub or small tree, 7-12 m (25-40 ft) with rough, grey-brown bark that is used for making a dye and has leaves that are furry with hairs on the underneath side. It is grown for both its fruit and foliage for human and livestock consumption. The flowers have an unpleasant smell but are attractive to bees for the nectar and pollen. The wood makes good firewood, charcoal, fence posts and furniture. Because of its thorns and tangled branches, the tree makes an effective live fence. Poultices made from the steamed leaves and burned leaf ash are applied to the chest and throat respectively for infections.

Cultivation

Z. abyssinica is a valuable tree as it prefers growing in arid, tropical and subtropical climates in woodlands, grasslands, or riverbeds at low altitudes 400-2000 m (1300-6500 ft). It tolerates a wide variety of soils, temperatures as low as -25°C (-13° F) and rainfall from 300-2000 mm (12-80 in) yearly. The trees flower in mid-rainy season and the fruit is mature in the cool, dry season before the next rainy season begins.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The fruit is 2-3 cm (1 in) in diameter, red/red brown with one or two seeds inside an inner stone. Seeds do not require special conditions for storage other than cool and dry. In order to speed germination, stones need to be covered with hot water for 24 hours or cracked and soaked in cool water. Seeds can be sown in pots or the ground.

Pests and Diseases

The wood is resistant to termites and borers. In spite of the thorns, *Z. abyssinica* is browsed by cattle and sometimes cultivated as a fodder crop.

Cooking and Nutrition

The sweet fruits of the *Z. abyssinica* are 2-3 cm (1 in) in diameter with red or reddish brown skin. An inner stone contains 1 or 2 seeds. Fruit may be consumed fresh or in sauces. The leaves can be cooked and eaten as a vegetable.

References

Orwa C, Mutua A, Kindt R, Jamnadass R, Simons A. 2009. Agroforestry Database: a tree reference and selection guide version 4.0 (<http://www.worldagroforestry.org/treedb2/speciesprofile.php?Spid=84>)

<http://ecocrop.fao.org/ecocrop/srv/en/cropView?id=243766>