

MEXICAN SUNFLOWER

Tree Marigold, Tithonia

Tithonia diversifolia

Asteraceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

Tithonia is a perennial shrub native to Mexico and Central America and found in humid and sub-humid parts of Africa, Asia, and South America. Its hollow stems reach 3 m in height and become woody with age. Leaves are large (12-22 cm wide) with five lobes. Another distinguishing attribute is its large yellow flowers, which produce an abundance of seeds. It colonizes disturbed areas, often growing along roadsides or around the edges of fields.

Uses

Though often considered a weed, it can be used for animal fodder, compost, fuelwood, and insect control. Tithonia leaves are also used as a green manure; new growth is high in nitrogen (5.7%), phosphorus (0.5%), and potassium (2.8%).

Common Names

- Spanish
 - Jalacate

Cultivation

- **Elevation** – up to 1950 m
- **Rainfall** – 700-2500 mm
- **Soil Types** – grows on a wide range of soils
- **Temperature Range** – 12-38°C
- **Day Length Sensitivity** – not a significant factor
- **Light** – prefers full sun

Tithonia is known for its invasiveness, spreading quickly from seeds and underground stems. It is best used in areas where it already occurs. Whether established from seed (sown with a thin covering of soil) or soft/green cuttings (20 to 40 cm long), aim for an approximate spacing of 0.75 X 0.75 m. The plants grow rapidly and require little if any fertilizer. Tithonia may be grown as an annual in areas where growth dies back during cold or dry seasons.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Once established, the biomass can be harvested every four months for use as a green manure. Nutrients are most concentrated in young leaves and stems. Regular pruning can be done to enhance leaf production.

Pests and Diseases

Not a significant factor.

Cooking and Nutrition

Inedible; leaves are reportedly used medicinally.

References

Ecocrop. 1993-2007. [Tithonia diversifolia](#). Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome, Italy.

Heuzé V., G. Tran, S. Giger-Reverdin, F. Lebas. 2016. [Mexican sunflower \(Tithonia diversifolia\)](#). Feedipedia, a programme by INRA, CIRAD, AFZ and FAO

IUCN. 2012. [Guide to some invasive plants affecting Lake Tanganyika, Nairobi, Kenya](#): IUCN ISI and Lake Tanganyika Authority. 64p.

Motis, T. 2017. [Tithonia for green manure](#). ECHO Development Notes 134:8-9