

# Balanites aegyptiaca

# Balanitaceae

Indigenous

Af: Alaito

Eng: Desert date

Nr: Inditi

Tr: Kog

Ar: Heglig

Hd: Tesha

Sh: Mekieto

Bl: Guada

Ktn: Shengla

Tg: Mekie

## Ecology:

A tree found all over Africa from arid and semi-arid regions to sub-humid savannah and growing in a variety of soils. Common at altitudes 700-1,500 m all over Eritrea in valleys, along river banks, in depressions and on the footslopes of hills. *Balanites* is more common at lower altitudes, e.g. in Hazemo plains and Mereb valley and around Molki, Tokombia, Shambuko, upper Barka, Daerotai, Begu, Afabet, Dongolo and Ghinda. It is often associated with *Acacia seyal*, *A. tortilis* and *Capparis decidua*.

## Uses:

**Firewood, charcoal, poles, timber** (furniture, farm implements), **utensils, tool handles**, food (fruit), medicine (roots, fruit, bark), fodder (shoots, fruit), mulch, shade, windbreak, gum, ceremonial meetings, fencing (cut branches), oil (fruit), fishing (crushed fruit used as fish poison).

## Description:

A small evergreen tree about 10 m, crown rounded in a **tangled mass of thorny branches**. **BARK:** Smooth and green, later dark, deeply cracked and corky. **THORNS:** To 8 **cm**, soft at first, then **woody**. **LEAVES:** Distinctive pairs of grey-green leaflets, ovate. **FLOWERS:** Fragrant, **yellow-green** clusters. **FRUIT:** Oblong to **5 cm, both ends round, yellow when ripe, a hard pointed seed** within surrounded by **yellow-brown bittersweet flesh**, seed easily separated.

## Propagation:

Seedlings, direct sowing, root suckers.

## Seed:

Seed large, 4 x 2 cm. Plant the seed with the stem end down for best results. Germinates in 1-4 weeks. No. of seed per kg:  $\pm 1,000$ .

## treatment:

Soak seed in cold water for 24 hours.

## storage:

After removal from the fruit the seed can be stored for up to one year. Store dry and insect-free.

## Management:

Pollarding, coppicing; protect young seedlings from browsing.

## Remarks:

An important species for dry areas as it produces fruit even in very dry years. The wood is termite resistant. Extracts of the fruit and bark can be used to kill the snail hosts of bilharzia. The free-swimming stages of both bilharzia and guinea worm are also killed if the extract is put into the infected water. A useful agroforestry species with very many reported uses throughout Africa.

