

Delonix regia

Fabaceae (Caesalpiaceae)

Madagascar

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Flamboyant, Flame tree; **Swahili:** Mjohoro, Msikukuu.

DESCRIPTION: A medium-sized deciduous to semi-deciduous tree with a **spreading umbrella-like crown**, reaching a maximum of 15 m but usually much less. **BARK:** Grey, smooth. **LEAVES:** Light green and feathery, twice-divided (bipinnate) to 45 cm long, with about **12–16 opposite pairs of primary divisions, terminal single leaflet or division lacking**, each division with about 5–26 pairs of leaflets (fewer towards the base), each leaflet about 1 cm long, tip rounded or notched, base flattened but asymmetrical. **FLOWERS:** **Brilliant scarlet to orange clusters**, sometimes yellow, each flower up to 10 cm across with 5 petals, 1 cream, heavily spotted, often appearing before the leaves and remaining for some time. **FRUIT:** Conspicuous **long, flat and heavy woody pods**, to 75 cm long, remaining many months on the tree. When dry they break open to release oblong seeds about 1 cm long.

ECOLOGY: Now very rare in the wild of its native Madagascar, this deciduous tree is grown throughout the lowland tropics. Prefers sandy soil. Widely planted in Kenya, especially in towns as an ornamental, shade and avenue tree, 0–1,600 m. Agroclimatic Zones II–IV. In flower June–July and also December–January at the coast, hence the name *Msikukuu* (Christmas tree) there.

USES: Firewood, bee forage, shade, ornamental, avenue tree, beads (seeds).

PROPAGATION: Seedlings (sow seeds in pots), direct sowing at site.

SEED: The species seeds prolifically: 2,000–3,000 seeds per kg. Germination rate 70–80%. Easy to propagate from seed.

treatment: Immerse seed in boiling water and allow to cool or nick the seed coat.

storage: Seed can be stored for long periods. Not usually attacked by insects.

MANAGEMENT: Fast growing; pollarding. May grow well but takes a long time to flower in cooler climates (>1,500 m), and when it finally does, flowering is poor.

REMARKS: This species has a shallow root system. The dense canopy makes it unsuitable for intercropping, and it produces much ground litter. A very common ornamental, but at the coast attacked by small caterpillars which drop off causing a nuisance to people sitting under it.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Blundell, 1987; Dharani, 2002; Jensen, 1999; Katende et al., 1995; Löttschert and Beese, 1983; Mbuya et al., 1994; National Academy of Sciences, 1979; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Storrs, 1979.

