

Diospyros mespiliformis

Ebenaceae



Indigenous

Agn: *Adew*

Am: *Ayeb*

Eng: *African ebony*

Mjr: *Dimmin*

Tg: *Ayeb*

Ecology

An evergreen tree of medium to low altitudes found in West, East and southern Africa in woodland, savanna and along river banks. In Ethiopia, it occurs mostly on rocky hillsides in lowland savannah, Euphorbia thickets and along river banks in Bereha, Dry, Moist, and Wet Kolla and Weyna Dega agroclimatic zones in most regions, 300-2,000 m.

Uses

Firewood, timber (construction, furniture), carving, walking sticks, food (fruit: fresh, fermented drink), medicine (bark, roots, fruit), bee forage, shade.

Description

A medium to large tree, to 25 m. There may be a tall clear bole from a buttressed base to the dense rounded crown. Young parts have silvery hairs. **BARK:** Grey-black, rough and squared, grooved. **LEAVES:** Alternate, shiny dark green, to 14 x 3 cm, the midrib raised below, edge wavy, tip rounded. **FLOWERS:** Fragrant, male clustered, female solitary, cream-white petals, 1 cm long. **FRUIT:** Rounded to 2.5 cm in a calyx cup, the 5 segments curling back, fruit yellow, later purplish, pulp soft and sweet with 4–6 brown, hairy seeds.

Propagation

Seedlings, cuttings.

Seed

Because of competition by birds, the collection should be immediately after the fruit start to turn yellow, and therefore from the crown. About 2,700–3,200 seeds per kg. Germination is good but fairly slow – within 50 days under ideal conditions, 2,700–3,200 seed per kg.

Treatment: Not necessary.

Storage: Depulp, clean under running water and dry in the sun if seed is to be stored. It can be stored for long periods in airtight containers.

Management

Pruning, coppicing, pollarding. Slow growing, but faster along rivers.

Remarks

Diospyros spp. produce valuable black heartwood, “ebony”. Only a few trees yield the black wood after felling. Pale at first, the timber gradually becomes dark brown. The wood is hard and tough with a fine grain. It is fungus and termite resistant. Sapwood cream-white, heartwood yellowish pink, darkening on drying and with age. The fruit can be eaten fresh or dried, or in the form of a fermented drink.

