

Gliricidia sepium**Fabaceae (Papilionaceae)****Central America, Mexico**

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Mother of cocoa, Mexican lilac, Quick stick.

DESCRIPTION: A leafy shrub-like tree growing up to 8 m, the trunk short and twisted, to 30 cm thick. **BARK:** Grey–light brown, smooth, cracked with age. **LEAVES:** Fern-like, with many pointed leaflets on a leaf stalk to 25 cm, hanging down. **FLOWERS:** Pretty, **mauve-pink**, centre yellow, **grow on the woody stems**. **FRUIT:** Pods, thin and flat to 15 cm long, yellow-grey then black when dry; 3–8 seeds set free when pod breaks open.

ECOLOGY: A tree or shrub, widespread in the tropics due to its many uses and speed of growth. It grows in a variety of soils, both acidic and those low in fertility, mainly in humid lowlands, 0–1,600 m. In Kenya, it also does well in drier areas like Kitui and Isiolo. Agroclimatic Zones III–VI.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, poles, posts, tool handles, farm implements, fodder (leaves, shoots, pods, seeds for ruminants), bee forage, shade, ornamental, mulch, nitrogen-fixing, soil conservation, windbreak, live fence, stakes.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, cuttings, direct sowing at site. Cuttings are the best choice for live fences.

SEED: 6,000–13,000 seeds per kg; germination rate 90% when fresh.

treatment: Immerse seed in hot water, allow to cool and soak for 12 hours.

storage: Seed does not store for long. It is best to use fresh seed.

MANAGEMENT: Fast growing, coppicing, pollarding, lopping.

REMARKS: The Latin name means ‘rat-killer’ as a poison can be made from the leaves which is toxic to rats as well as other non-ruminants like pigs, donkeys and horses. Bark, roots and seeds may also contain poison. A very useful

quick fence can be grown from crossed stakes which soon sprout. Wood is resistant to termites. Used in Sri Lanka as coffee shade. Low palatability to livestock.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Jensen, 1999; Katende et al., 1995; Mbuya et al., 1994; National Academy of Sciences, 1979, 1980.

