

Central America, Mexico

**Common names:** **English:** Mother of cocoa, tree of iron, Mexican lilac, quick stick.

**Ecology:** A small tree grown widely in the tropics due to its fast growth and multiple uses. It grows on a variety of soils, both acidic and low in fertility, mainly in humid tropical lowlands or lake basins, up to 1,600 m. Not yet widely distributed in Uganda, it has been planted at Entebbe, around Kampala and in trials in Kabale.

**Uses:** Firewood, charcoal, posts, fodder (leaves, shoots, pods), bee forage, mulch, shade, ornamental, nitrogen fixation, soil conservation and improvement, live fence, live stakes.

**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.

**Propagation:** Seedlings,- cuttings, direct sowing at site.

**Seed:** No. of seeds per kg: 6,500-8,000. Germination over 90%.

**treatment:** soak seed in hot water, allow to cool and soak overnight before sowing.

**storage:** seed does not store for long; use fresh seed or cuttings for best results.

**Management:** A fast-growing species; coppicing, pollarding, lopping.

**Remarks:** The Latin name means "rat killer" as a poison can be made from the leaves. Bark, roots and seeds may also contain poison. Although leaves can be fodder for goats and cattle, they are toxic to non-ruminants such as horses, donkeys and pigs. As leaves are not very palatable, mix with grass, straw or other roughage as a high-protein supplement. A very useful quick fence can be grown with crossed stakes which sprout easily. Wood is resistant to termites. The tree has been used to form a firebelt around forests and farms as it is fire resistant. Not yet well known in Uganda.

