

Gliricidia sepium

Papilionioideae

Central America, Mexico

English: Mother of cocoa, tree of iron, Mexican lilac, quick stick

Ecology: This tree has been widely grown in tropical lowlands all over the world, mainly below 500 m but up to 2,000 m. For many years, it has been interplanted with cocoa as a green manure and soil improver. In Zambia, trials for use in fallows and fodder banks continue in Eastern Province at Msekera Regional Agricultural Research Station. Some provenances are suitable for dry areas. It can grow in a wide variety of soils.

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

Description: A small semi-evergreen tree to 8 m; the trunk very short with a spreading crown. **BARK:** grey–light brown, smooth, cracked with age. **LEAVES:** compound, the leaf stalk to 25 cm; many leaflets, oval and pointed, hang down. **FLOWERS:** **mauve-pink**, centre yellow, **grow out of woody stems**. **FRUIT:** thin, flat pods up to 15 cm long, yellow-grey, then black when dry; 3–8 seeds released when pod breaks open.

Propagation: Seedlings, cuttings, direct seeding.

Seed: Germination > 90%. No. of seeds per kg: 6,500–8,000.

treatment: Soak seed in hot water and cool for 24 hours.

storage: It is best to use fresh seed; but it will store up to 1 year.

Management: Coppicing. Slow growing in Eastern Province.

Remarks: Although leaves are fodder for goats and cattle, they are toxic to non-ruminants like horses, donkeys and pigs. Livestock do not find these leaves very palatable; so they should be mixed with grass, straw or other roughage as a high-protein supplement. Allowing the leaves to wilt before feeding to livestock also improves palatability. A fence can be made from cuttings. Termite-resistant.

