

Jatropha multifida

Euphorbiaceae

Tropical America

Trade names: Coral bush, coral tree

Common names: **English:** Coral bush.

Ecology: One of the American species introduced to Africa, this attractive exotic plant is widely cultivated as an ornamental and planted in villages. It prefers dry sites.

Uses: Medicine, ornamental.

Description: An attractive multi-stemmed shrub 1-2 m or a tree to 6 m, the branches thick, smooth and succulent, giving copious clear sticky latex if cut. **LEAVES:** grow in spirals at the end of branches, each with a thick juicy stalk about 16 cm, having distinctive **thread-like stipules** at the base. **Leaves divided into 9-12 lobes**, simple or deeply cut with long pointed tips, about 10-15 cm long by 3 cm wide. Leaf shiny green above, much paler below, edges rolled under. **FLOWERS:** small in branched heads on **a long terminal stalk, buds and branches bright coral in colour**; 5 free petals and 5 orange anthers in male flowers which surround the few female flowers. **FRUIT:** a **three-part capsule**, green and juicy, ripening hard and yellow, somewhat **rounded to 3 cm across**, only slowly breaking open. The 3 pale brown, triangular-rounded, spotted seeds to 2 cm have a fleshy bump (caruncle).

Propagation: Seedlings, cuttings.

Seed: Collect capsules from the tree before they split open and then separate seed.

treatment: crack or scar seed before planting to hasten germination,

storage: susceptible to insect attack. Add ash to reduce insect damage.

Management: Fast growing. Pruning.

Remarks: The leaves are used to treat fresh wounds. Like *J. curcas* the seeds have strong purgative properties. The large leaves make it a decorative garden plant.

