

# Leucaena leucocephala

# Mimosaceae

Central America

**Common names:** **English:** Leucaena.

**Ecology:** Widely introduced in the tropics over the last 100 years, reaching Africa in 1950. In Uganda, it was introduced in tea plantations and as a host for the vanilla orchid. Later it was planted among other crops as a nitrogen-fixing shrub. Unfortunately, it now suffers from attack by the leucaena psyllid, *Heteropsylla cubana*.

**Uses:** Firewood, charcoal, poles, timber (from giant types), fodder (leaves, shoots), bee forage, mulch, nitrogen fixation, soil conservation, host for vanilla orchid.

**Description:** An evergreen shrub or tree 5-20 m, depending on the variety, medium leafy canopy, develops a deep tap-root even as a seedling. **LEAVES:** compound alternate with many **leaflets, each thin and pointed to 1.5 cm**. Leaves and **leaflets fold up** with heat, cold or lack of water. There is a conspicuous round mark on the leaf stalk just before the leaflets. **FLOWERS:** **white, round heads about 2 cm** across on a long stalk from the leaf axil. **FRUIT:** numerous bunches of **thin, dry pods** 10-15 cm, persisting on the tree, releasing 12-25 hard, **shiny brown seeds**.

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

**Seed:** The species yields plenty of viable seeds. Germination rate 50-85%. No. of seeds per kg: 13,000-34,000.

**treatment:** Soak in hot water for two minutes.

**storage:** Seed can be stored for long periods if kept dry and insect free.

**Management:** Very fast growing; lopping. It coppices well.

**Remarks:** The many varieties have been classified into three types, and preferably the giant types (K8 and K28) should be used. The tree is a potential weed due to prolific seed production and the aggressive" root system, especially in hot, humid conditions. Mimosine in the leaves can cause hair loss and stomach problems in livestock. Total feed should not contain more than 20% of Leucaena. Root nodules are very active in fixing nitrogen under suitable conditions.

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