

**Melia azedarach**

Meliaceae

Asia, Australia

**COMMON NAMES:** English: Persian lilac, Chinaberry, China tree;  
Luo: Dwele.

**DESCRIPTION:** A small tree, 5–6 m, but can reach 10 m, usually deciduous, with a thin trunk and spreading crown. **BARK:** Grey, smooth, later rough and brown, branchlets dotted with breathing pores. **LEAVES:** Alternate, 2-pinnately divided, on branched stalks, **to 40 cm long**, up to 6 pairs of pinnae and **3–9 leaflets**, each one bright shiny green, narrow, to 8 cm, the **edge irregularly toothed, the tip long and pointed**. **FLOWERS:** Lilac coloured, fragrant in large **rounded clusters** to 25 cm, each flower with 5 pale purple-white petals and a **dark purple centre**. **FRUIT:** Yellow-orange, oval to 1.5 cm, persisting on the bare tree. Each fruit contains a stone with 4–6 dark brown seeds inside.

**ECOLOGY:** A popular ornamental tree planted since Babylonian times. Native of Asia and Australia but now grown throughout the tropics and subtropics for its beautiful lilac flowers and large dark-green compound leaves. Naturalized in many parts of the world including the United States. The growth rate in Kenya is not as good as in its natural area, and in dry areas it often suffers from termite attack. Nevertheless it is widely planted, mainly for shade and as an ornamental. It grows in most soils, both acidic and saline, from the coast to 2,000 m. Agroclimatic Zones II–V. In flower November–December in Nyanza and Western Kenya.

**USES:** Timber, furniture, poles, posts, tool handles, medicine, bee forage, shade, ornamental, beads (seeds).

**PROPAGATION:** Seedlings, wildings, direct sowing at site.

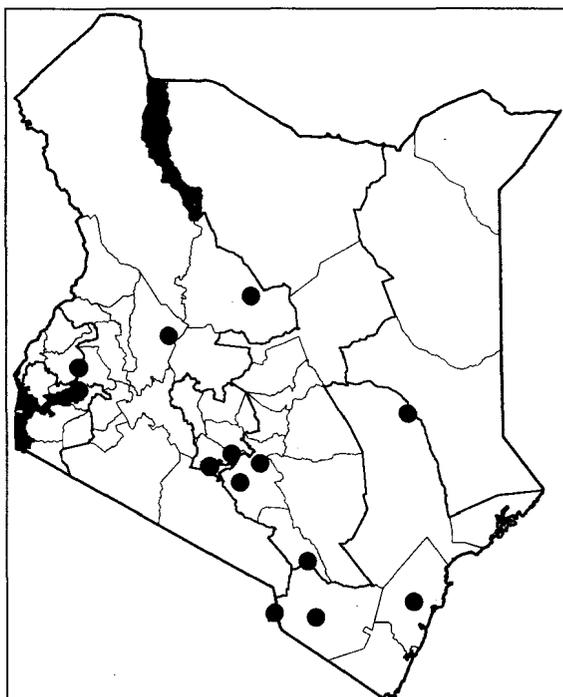
**SEED:** The species is a prolific seeder with a high germination rate; 500–3,000 stones per kg (average in Kenya around 2,100), each stone with 4–6 seeds (multi-germ). Pulp should be removed from the stones and the stones cleaned, but with minimal human exposure due to fruit toxicity.

**treatment:** Not necessary.

**storage:** Seed can be stored at room temperature for some time.

**MANAGEMENT:** Fairly fast growing, pollarding, lopping, coppicing, pruning.

**REMARKS:** The seeds, and to a lesser extent the leaves and bark, are poisonous to human beings, livestock and poultry if large amounts are ingested. Care should be taken when using the plant for medicine as overdoses have been known to cause stomach and nerve disorders.

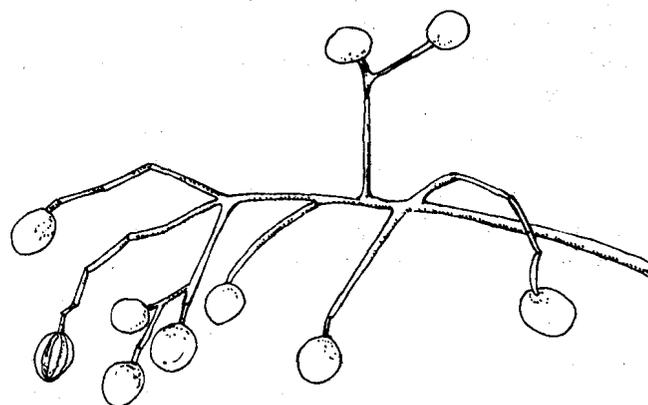


## *Melia azedarach* (cont)

The tree is very fast growing in the Himalayas. The species has been widely misidentified and confused with the neem tree, *Azadirachta indica*, which it resembles but is easily distinguished by the leaves (see illustrations). Extracts from the plant have been reported to have insecticidal and antiviral properties. The species may become weedy, but in Kenya this has not been a problem. It is relatively drought resistant. Flowers and seeds are

dropped in large quantities and may therefore be a menace when in season. The genus *Melia* is a small one, consisting of only 3 members.

**FURTHER READING:** <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Albrecht, 1993; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Blundell, 1987; Dharani, 2002; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Katende et al., 1995; Lötschert and Beese, 1983; Mbuya et al., 1994; National Academy of Sciences, 1983; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002.



Fruiting branch

