

Oxytenanthera abyssinica

Poaceae



Indigenous

Ag: *Shemel*
Am: *Shmel*
Brt: *Gagu*
Eng: *Lowland bamboo*
Gmz: *Enta*
Or: *Shimala*
Sh: *Elta*

Ecology

In continental Africa, the lowland bamboo grows in Ethiopia, and westward to Senegal and southward to Zimbabwe. It is the hardiest of the three African bamboos, and it grows in savanna woodland, usually in river valleys and often found on very poor soils. In most places, it is in demand for building. In Ethiopia, it is mainly confined to the western side of the central highlands in Dry and Moist Kolla agroclimatic zones of Benishagum Gumuz, and Humera areas, 1,200—1,800 m.

Uses

Poles (building), furniture, water pipes, arrow shafts, walking sticks, fodder (leaves), baskets, fencing material.

Description

A tall grass to 13 m with woody culms, in dense clumps, arching over. Unusual in having solid stems, up to 10 cm in diameter at the base. LEAVES: Blue-green, base rounded, the tip long and spiny, usually 15 x 2.5 cm, but up to 30 x 5 cm. There are irritating dark brown hairs on the leaf sheath. FLOWERS AND FRUIT: Spikelets narrowed, pointed, 2.5 cm in dense rounded clusters 6 cm across. Flowering

takes place about every 7 years. Then the clumps die down but shoot up one year later from the rhizomes.

Propagation

Suckers and rhizomes; rarely, seed.

Seed

Rarely used.

Treatment: Not applicable

Storage: Not applicable.

Management

Needs to be controlled by cutting back.

Remarks

Like most bamboos, each plant flowers only once and then dies. Fences are susceptible to damage by termites and borers. The plant survives fire in its natural habitat. Small stems can be used for pipes and arrow shafts, larger ones for fences, building, furniture, beds and baskets.

