

Parkinsonia aculeata

Caesalpinioideae

Tropical America

Common names: Eng: Jerusalem thorn.

Ecology: The natural range for *P. aculeata* is semi-arid areas from the southern United States to Argentina. Cultivated in dry tropical areas of Africa and south Asia, it is almost naturalized from the coastal lowlands up to 1,400 m. It prefers moist sandy loams, but will also thrive in dry sandy and rocky soils as well as alkaline and saline ones. It can grow in dry areas as well* as in wetter parts at higher altitudes, 200-1,000 mm annual rainfall.

Uses: Firewood, charcoal, medicine, fodder (pods, leaves), bee forage, shade, ornamental, mulch, soil conservation, live fence.

Description: A spiny shrub or small tree, usually 5-8 m, light, feathery foliage and a low crown, sometimes deciduous in the dry season. BARK: distinctive yellow to cream-brown, smooth. LEAVES: groups of **thin, winged leaf stalks to 30 cm** with well-spaced tiny **leaflets**. The branchlets have sharp thorns to 1 cm beside the leaves. FLOWERS: very fragrant, **bright yellow with orange stamens on spikes** to 15 cm. FRUIT: bunches of woody pale-brown **Pods, cylindrical, narrow, but constricted between** seeds. Pods contain 6 or more dark brown oval seeds and remain on the tree.

Propagation: Seedlings, direct sowing.

Seed **info.:** No. of seeds per kg: 11,000-15,000. The species is a prolific seeder. Germination 30%-70% or more in 2-10 days.

treatment: soak seed in hot water and allow to cool overnight, or nick seed coat with a sharp knife.

storage: seed stores well for long periods in cool, dry, air-tight containers.

Management: Fast growing; pollarding.

Remarks: Seedlings are susceptible to attack by termites and so young seedlings should be protected. Extensively used in arid and semi-arid Kenya. The tree can become a serious weed due to its prolific seeding, but it is a good species for reclamation of degraded sites.

