

Phoenix dactylifera

Arecaceae

Persian Gulf area

Am: *Yetemir zaf, Zembaba*

Eng: *Date palm*

Ecology

A well-known and important food tree found in desert areas from Morocco to India, 0–1,500 m. It requires a well-drained fertile soil, high temperatures and low humidity during fruiting. The palm must have a high water table. It will stand alkaline soil but not waterlogging. In Ethiopia, it grows well in Moist Bereha beside rivers, and in Moist and Wet Kolla and lower Weyna Dega agroclimatic zones in Afar plains and Gamo Gofa, Harerge and Bale regions, 0—1,400 m.

Uses

Firewood, posts, utensils, food (fruit), fodder, medicine, shade, ornamental, windbreak, thatch.

Description

A palm with a slender trunk reaching 20–30 m, the trunk covered with the remains of leaf bases. Many suckers or offshoots are produced around the trunk. LEAVES: 30–50 crowded leaves, each to 3 m grey-green, the leaflets sharply pointed; lowest leaves are thorny and removed by cultivators. FLOWERS: Male and female trees, a ratio of 1 male to 40–50 female trees is required for fruiting, but the pollen may not always be ready at the best time for pollination. FRUIT: Large hanging bunches of dates, needing support. Ripe dates 5 x 2 cm, yellow to golden-brown, with one grooved seed, the “stone”.



Propagation

Suckers (offshoots) are preferable as male or female plants can be chosen and as the vegetative propagation ensures young plants with the same characteristics as the mother plant. If the shoots have already formed roots at the mother plant, they can be directly planted, otherwise they are kept in a nursery for 6 weeks for rooting.

Seed

Normally not used.

Treatment: Not applicable

Storage: Not applicable

Management

Hand pollination is recommended for good date production; remove suckers on palm trees in production.

Remarks

A potential food and cash crop for selected sites in dry areas. Needs irrigation until established. Economic yields can be obtained after 6–7 years (around 45–50 kg per tree annually, up to 80–100 kg is possible with good variety and intensive management).



Photo: Patrick Maundu

