

Pithecellobium dulce

Fabaceae (Mimosaceae)

Latin America

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Madras thorn, Manila tamarind;
Swahili: Maramata.

DESCRIPTION: A thin shapeless shrub or tree 4–15 m. **BARK:** Pale and smooth with horizontal marks, bole short, young branches thorny, drooping. **LEAVES:** Thin stalks bear 2 pairs of leaflets, each to 5 cm, asymmetric oval, the tip rounded or notched, short spines at the base of each leaf pair. **FLOWERS:** Small, cream-yellow on a short stalk, bunches of green-white stamens 1 cm across. **FRUIT:** Heavy pods, about 12 cm, spirally twisted, narrowed between seeds, red when mature, splitting to release glossy black seeds almost covered with the fleshy red and white edible aril. A sweet pulp surrounds the seeds.

ECOLOGY: Introduced in many parts of the tropics as a shade, fruit and hedge plant, and now widely naturalized in some areas, including Kenya (e.g. Thika and the coast). Found in bushland and on the fringes of woodland at lower altitudes. Tolerates arid and semi-arid conditions. Agroclimatic Zones III–VI.

USES: Firewood, poles (construction), edible fruit, drink (beverage from fruit), fodder (leaves, pods and seeds), bee forage, shade, sand stabilization, soil conservation, windbreak, tannin, oil (from seeds), live fence.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, direct sowing at site, cuttings.

SEED: 7,000–16,000 seeds per kg.

treatment: Not necessary.

MANAGEMENT: Fairly fast growing; coppicing, trimming (for live fence).

REMARKS: This species has the potential for becoming a weed if not well managed. It is popular as a spiny hedge. The fruit pulp may be made into a drink. This genus has over 3 dozen species found in the warmer parts of America.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Dharani, 2002; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Jensen, 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; National Academy of Sciences, 1979, 1980.

