

Sclerocarya birrea

Anacardiaceae



Indigenous

Or: *Didissa, Didigssa*

Nur: *Chobwe*

Tm: *Gwemel*

Ecology

An African fruit tree occurring at medium to low altitudes from West Africa to Eritrea and south to Natal scattered in mixed deciduous woodland and wooded grassland. In Ethiopia, it is found in open deciduous woodlands on rocky slopes in Dry and Moist Bereha, Kolla and Weyna Dega agroclimatic zones of western Tigray, Shewa, Gambella, Gamu Gofa and Sidamo, 400-1,700 m.

Use

Food (fruit), jelly, drink (fermented fruit juice), medicine (bark).

Description

A deciduous tree 10–18 m with a thick bole and large branches to a light, rounded crown. **BARK:** Grey, then black and thick with irregular cracks and raised scales; inner bark pink-red. **LEAVES:** Compound, crowded at tips of branches, 3–18 pairs of leaflets, each stalked, oval to 10 cm, tip pointed or blunt. **FLOWERS:** Male and female flowers on the same or different trees; pale green male flowers in spikes, hanging down and often with insects; female flowers solitary, green-pink. **FRUIT:** Rounded and fleshy to 3.5 cm across, skin cream, spotted, peeling away from the sweet flesh, which tastes a bit like mango. Each fruit contains a hard edible stone that has 2–3 large seeds inside, oily and edible.

Propagation

Seedlings, wildings, cuttings.

Seed

Mature fruit fall while still green and ripen to a yellow colour on the ground. Around 400–450 stones per kg, each with 2–3 seed inside. Germination may reach around 40 % after 6 weeks.

Treatment: Germination is hastened if flesh is removed, stone cleaned and soaked in cold water for 24 hours before sowing.

Storage: Can be stored well in airtight containers at cool temperature but viability is lost within a month at room temperature.

Management

Produces root suckers. Young trees coppice easily; can be grafted for best varieties.

Remarks

The fruits are eaten raw as a snack. The fruits can be made into an alcoholic drink and delicious amber jelly. Vitamin C content of the fruits is reported to be 4 times that of orange juice. The bark is used to treat dysentery and diarrhoea. It is among the most highly valued indigenous species for its fruits (nuts). In South Africa, it is reported to have been declared protected.

