

Sesbania sesban

Fabaceae



Indigenous

Am: *Girangire*

Eng: *River bean, Egyptian rattle pod*

Or: *Enchini, Harcha*

Sd: *Rakile lo'od, Get beyo*

Tg: *Tetem agazen, Shashata*

Ecology

One of many useful African *Sesbania* spp. which survive waterlogging and fix nitrogen. Naturally distributed from Senegal to Somalia and south to South Africa. Cultivated throughout tropical Africa and Asia. It is found at the margin of fresh-water lakes and seasonal ponds. Some types tolerate acid and saline soils. Easy to establish even in waterlogged soil and dry eroded soil. In Ethiopia, it performs well in Moist and Wet Bereha, Kolla and Weyna Dega agroclimatic zones of Afar plains and in nearly all other regions, 300—2,000 m.

Uses

Firewood, poles, medicine (ground leaves), fodder (leaves), shade (young coffee), mulch, nitrogen fixation, soil improvement, soil conservation, fibres (young stems), soap (leaves).

Description

A deciduous, short-lived shrub or tree to 8 m. BARK: Red-brown, young shoots hairy. LEAVES: Compound to 12 cm long, 10–25 pairs of leaflets, each leaflet to 2 cm oblong, tip notched, narrow. FLOWERS: Pale yellow, speckled maroon, in few-flowered sprays to 15 cm long. FRUIT: Abundant bunches of thin pale brown pods to 20 cm, with separated sections so seeds rattle within.

Propagation

Wildings, direct sowing at site.

Seed

The species is a prolific seeder with a high germination rate. About 110,000 seed per kg. Germination about 80 %.

Treatment: Not necessary for fresh seed, soak stored seed in cold or tepid water for 24 hours before sowing.

Storage: Seed can be stored for long periods if kept in a cool and dry place, but best germination from fresh seed.

Management

Very fast growing. Pruning, short rotation.

Remarks

The species may harbour root-knot nematodes. The genetic diversity of *Sesbania* types allows for selection (e.g. for different uses, management, soil types).

The leaf mulch and nitrogen-fixation features make this a tree of great potential for intercropping and thereby soil improvement on small farms.



Photo: Patrick Maundu

