



Tree Species No. TTS14

Bauhinia purpurea, Family Caesalpiniaceae

Bauhinia purpurea is a tropical plant that is usually single stemmed, with smooth yellow-grey bark and light green bilobate (two lobes) leaves that are up to 20 cm long. It is a frost hardy and light demanding species. The aerial parts are known to have insecticidal properties against *Plutella xylostella* (diamond-back moth) which attacks brassicas.

Common names: Purple camel's foot tree, purple orchid tree, butterfly tree.

Distribution: It is native to Hong Kong but has been introduced to much of Africa including, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia and Zaïre. It can also be found in Asia and around the Indian Ocean.

Ecology

Rainfall: 500-2774m or above, with no dry season or one of 2-6 months.

Temperature: 9-37°C. Temperatures of -4 or -5°C may be tolerated.

Altitude: Below 1500m.

Soil type: Prefers well drained loam soils.

Botany

Height: Up to 17m.

Flowers: The flowers are purple-pink and have five spreading petals that are 7.5-12.5cm wide.

Fruit: The fruit appear after 3 years and are long dark pods that are up to 30cm long and 2cm wide. 12-16 flat woody seeds are enclosed inside.

Uses

Main: The flowers and shoots can be eaten as a vegetable and the leaves, pods and shoots are a useful fodder. The wood is used for fuel and charcoal and can produce tannin.

Other: It is also used for soil improvement, erosion control and as an ornamental tree.

Cultural instructions

Seeds: There are approximately 2460-4200 seeds per kg. Grow from seed or by hardwood cuttings. Sow in trays and transfer to bags in the nursery.

Pre-treatment: Seeds may be sown without pre-treatment or soak in cold tepid water for 48 hours.

Germination: There is a usual germination rate of 70-100% provided conditions are good.

Management: Coppicing, lopping and regular weeding is required. It will probably require staking at first to ensure the development of a good shape.

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