

LOCAL NAMES

Afrikaans (grootblaarvalsoring); English (poison-pod albizia, large-leaved false thorn); Swahili (mnduruasi, mkenge, mchani-ndovu); Zulu (umVangazi, umPhiso, umBhangazi)

BOTANIC DESCRIPTION

Albizia versicolor is a deciduous tree up to 20 m tall with a spreading rounded to flat crown. Bark on young branches covered with dense brownish to yellowish hairs, but corky, greyish brown and rough on older branches and stems.

Leaves bi-pinnate, up to 30 cm long, with 1-3 pairs of leaflets, the top pair the largest, hairy, venation prominent and much raised below, margin smooth, new leaves soft and bright reddish brown, autumn leaves yellow.

Flowers faintly, scented, in half-spherical heads, creamy white, stamens up to 4 cm long.

Fruit a large pod, reddish brown when young but pale brown when mature, up to 27 cm long, thinly textured, with thickened margins.

Albizia is named after F. de Albizzi, nobleman from Florence who brought an Asian species *Albizia julibrissin* into cultivation in Europe in 1749, and *versicolor* means variously coloured, referring to the leaves.

BIOLOGY

Flowering occurs from September to December and fruiting from December to March in South Africa.



Flowers and leaves (Bart Wursten)



Pods (Bart Wursten)

ECOLOGY

A. versicolor occurs from Ethiopia to as far south as Natal in South Africa. It is common in deciduous woodlands, bushlands and wooded grasslands. In some countries such as Uganda, it is very rare, occurring only on stony hillsides in Mbarara, Bushenyi and Ntungamo Districts.

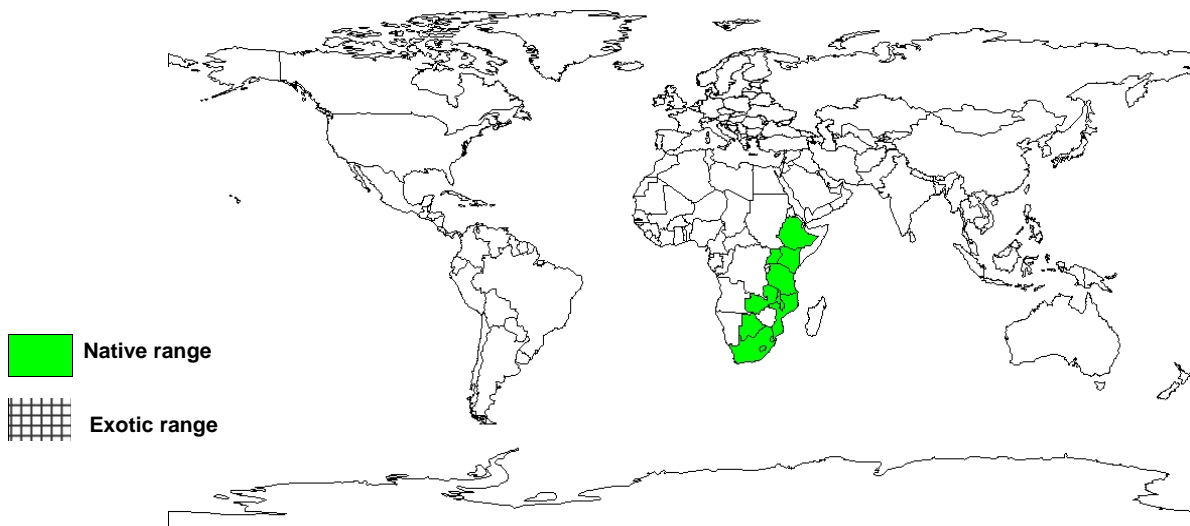
BIOPHYSICAL LIMITS

Soil type: *A. versicolor* prefers well-drained soils.

DOCUMENTED SPECIES DISTRIBUTION

Native: Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia

Exotic:



The map above shows countries where the species has been planted. It does neither suggest that the species can be planted in every ecological zone within that country, nor that the species can not be planted in other countries than those depicted. Since some tree species are invasive, you need to follow biosafety procedures that apply to your planting site.

PRODUCTS

Fodder: Leaves and shoots eaten by elephant and kudu whereas the seeds are eaten by the brown-headed parrots.

Apiculture: When in flower, *A.versicolor* is a source of nectar and pollen for bees.

Fuel: It produces firewood and quality charcoal.

Fibre: The inner bark produces a fairly strong rope.

Timber: The termite-resistant wood is often used for making furniture, cabinets, parquet floors and as general timber woods on the farm and in the building trade.

Tannin or dyestuff: The bark contains about 5% tannins and is used for tanning leather.

Poison: Young pods can cause poisoning of cattle and sheep, resulting in a condition termed albiziosis. Outbreaks of this disease occur in late winter or early spring when pods are blown from the trees. Poisoned animals can be treated with high dosages of vitamin B6.

Medicine: The root bark is used as an enema and purgative. The leaves and bark are used to soothe headaches. An infusion made from the bark is used as a wash for sore eyes and to treat skin diseases.

Other products: Roots boiled with water can be used as a soap substitute.

SERVICES

Shade or shelter: It makes a beautiful shade tree and can be planted along lands for much needed shade for farm workers during the hot summer months.

Nitrogen fixing: *A. versicolor* is a nitrogen fixer.

Ornamental: This tree makes a beautiful specimen plant and is strongly recommended for use in any large gardens or parks.

Intercropping: It fixes nitrogen and does not have an invasive root system. It can therefore be used in intercroppings.

TREE MANAGEMENT

A. versicolor has a medium growth rate and is normally managed by lopping and pollarding.

GERMPLASM MANAGEMENT

Pods are collected while still hanging on the trees because seeds on the ground are usually infested with insect pests. There are 6 000-8 000 seeds/kg. The seeds can be stored for long periods if kept dry and in insect free conditions.

FURTHER READNG

Coates-Palgrave K. 1988. Trees of southern Africa. C.S. Struik Publishers Cape Town.

Katende AB et al. 1995. Useful trees and shrubs for Uganda. Identification, Propagation and Management for Agricultural and Pastoral Communities. Regional Soil Conservation Unit (RSCU), Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).

Palmer E, Pitman N. 1972. Trees of Southern Africa Vol. 2. A.A. Balkema Cape Town.

Storrs AEG. 1995. Know your trees: some common trees found in Zambia. Regional Soil Conservation Unit (RSCU).

Venter F, Venter J-A. 1996. Making the most of Indigenous trees. Briza Publications.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Orwa C, A Mutua, Kindt R , Jamnadass R, S Anthony. 2009 Agroforestry Database:a tree reference and selection guide version 4.0 (<http://www.worldagroforestry.org/sites/treedbs/treedatabases.asp>)