

LOCAL NAMES

English (Mauritius ebony, ebony persimmon, Ceylon ebony)

BOTANIC DESCRIPTION

D. ebenum is a slow-growing medium-sized tree up to 30 m tall and up to 90 cm in diameter. Bole straight, with buttresses up to 2 m high; crown dense. Bark surface scaly, fissured, black to grey-black.

Leaves ovate-oblong to oblong-lanceolate, 5-13 cm x 2-6 cm, base cuneate to rounded, apex slightly acuminate to rounded, glabrous, tertiary venation reticulate, inconspicuous above, prominent below.

Flowers mostly male and bisexual; male flowers in 3-16-flowered cymes, 4-merous, stamens 16; female and bisexual flowers solitary, 3-4 merous, calyx lobes valvate, glabrous, corolla divided to about halfway, staminodes 8, ovary with a single 4-5-lobed style and 8 uni-ovulate locules.

Fruit depressed globose to subglobose, up to 1.5 cm across, glabrous.

D. ebenum has been known for its black wood since ancient times.

BIOLOGY

In Sri Lanka, ebony occasionally seeds twice per year.

ECOLOGY

It occurs naturally in comparatively dry mixed evergreen forests usually as an understory tree with other *Diospyros* species, *Vitex altissima* and *Albizia odoratissima*.

BIOPHYSICAL LIMITS

Soils: *D. ebenum* prefers well drained soils with clay.

DOCUMENTED SPECIES DISTRIBUTION

Native: India, Sri Lanka

Exotic: Malaysia



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

Timber: *D. ebenum* is said to produce the best commercial black ebony. The sapwood is light yellowish grey, often streaked with black; heartwood very black, heavy with a specific gravity of 1.12. The wood is straight grained, fine and even-textured with a high glossy finish. The wood is difficult to season and work by hand. It is resistant to insect attack and fungi and very durable. It is mainly exported to China for furniture and to Europe as fancy wood. It finds use in sports goods, musical and mathematical instruments, ornamental carvings and turnery.

Poison: Fruits are used as fish poison.

Medicine: The gummy astringent fruits are used as a medicine and eaten in times of famine.

SERVICES

Shade or shelter: The tree has been planted in India as a shade tree for cardamom.

TREE MANAGEMENT

Ebony requires overhead light once seedlings establish.

GERMPLASM MANAGEMENT

There are about 9000 seeds/kg.

PESTS AND DISEASES

FURTHER READNG

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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>)