

LOCAL NAMES

English (grey-leaved saucer berry, grey-leaved cordia); Somali (marer, mareer); Swahili (mnya mate, mkamasi)

BOTANIC DESCRIPTION

Cordia sinensis is a low leafy shrub or bush, multi-stemmed tree 3-12 m high and often with slender branches tending to droop. The bark is brown to pale creamy-brown, finely fissured longitudinally, or smooth, dark grey on branches.

Leaves opposite, (sub)opposite or alternate, ovate to obovate or broadly, 2-12 x 1-4.5 cm, glabrous or slightly pubescent and often somewhat sandpapery; petiole about 10 mm long with long pale hairs.

Flowers white or cream, in terminal cymes 6-7 cm long, rather urn-shaped, corolla 8-9 cm long and calyx lobes are covered with yellowish-brown short soft hairs, browning when over.

Fruits conical, bright red or orange when ripe, 7-20 mm long, with conspicuous long tip and hang in conspicuous clusters.

Seed 1-4, hard, rough, yellowish cream.

The generic name honours a 16th century German botanist, Valerius Cordus. The specific epithet 'sinensis' refers to its Chinese origin.

BIOLOGY

Flowering occurs in December to February and August while fruiting in April to June and December. Fruit are eaten by monkeys, baboons and birds which are the main dispersal agents.



Flowers and leaves (Bart Wursten)



Fruits and leaves (Bart Wursten)

ECOLOGY

The species is common in dry riverine vegetation, usually with *Salvadora persica*, or in open bushland in low altitude arid and semi-arid areas on termite mounds and in littoral scrub.

BIOPHYSICAL LIMITS

Altitude: 0-1500 m

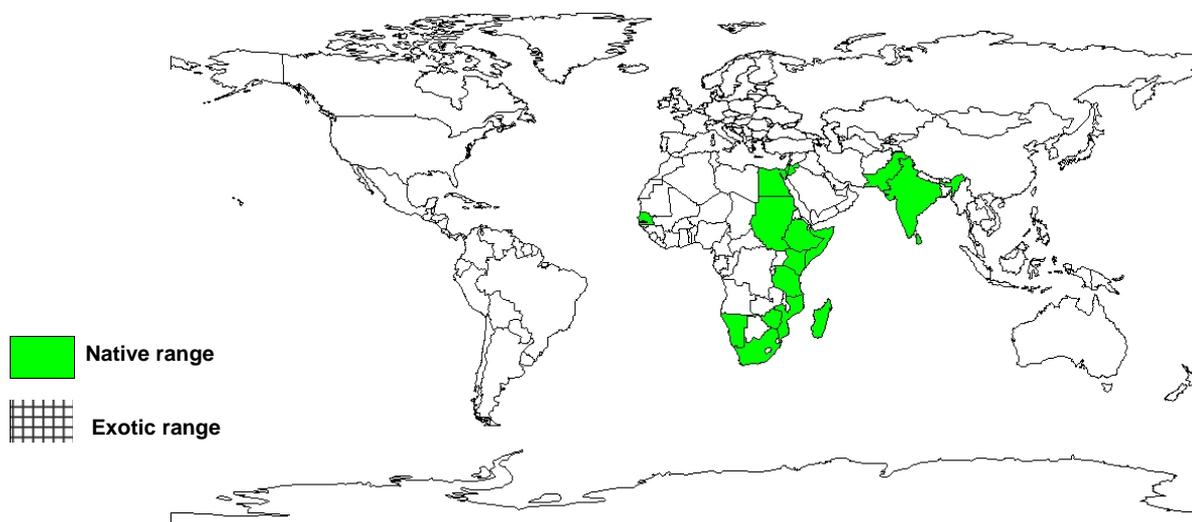
Mean Annual Rainfall: 600-1000 mm

Soil type: Prefers alluvial, sandy, red loam and rocky soils in moist river beds.

DOCUMENTED SPECIES DISTRIBUTION

Native: Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Pakistan, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Yemen, Republic of, Zimbabwe

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

Medicine: The roots and bark are used for stomach disorders in both children and adults. A decoction of boiled roots is used to treat malaria but can cause an abortion. Bark and roots are mixed to treat conjunctivitis in cattle.

Fodder: A very important source of fodder for goats, sheep, cattle and camels in dry areas.

Food: The sweet and sticky tasty pulp of the fruit is eaten fresh and often put in porridge as a sugar substitute. The fruit pulp is sometimes used to make juice or brew local beer and sometimes mixed with tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) juice and fermented.

Gum: The clear gum from the tree is edible.

Timber: The wood is used in the construction, furniture and for agricultural implements (such as tool handles, walking sticks, clubs, wooden spoons, stirrers and stools).

TREE MANAGEMENT

The species is fairly fast growing and tolerates lopping, pollarding, and coppicing.

GERMPLASM MANAGEMENT

Collect the fruits when they turn bright orange for maximum viability; germination rates of up to 80% can be achieved. Seed storage behaviour is orthodox. There are 6500 seeds per kg.

FURTHER READNG

Beentje HJ. 1994. Kenya trees, shrubs and lianas. National Museums of Kenya.

Maundu PM et al. 1999. Traditional food plants of Kenya. National Museums of Kenya.

Palgrave KC. 1988. Trees of Southern Africa, Revised Edition. C. Struik Publishers, Cape Town/Johannesburg. pp .804.

Warfa AM. 1990. Taxonomy and distribution of *Cordia sinensis* and *C. nevillei* (Boraginaceae), a widespread species pair in Africa and Asia. *Nordic Journal of Botany*. 9(6): 649-656.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Orwa C, Mutua A , Kindt R , Jamnadass R, Simons A. 2009. Agroforestry Database:a tree reference and selection guide version 4.0 (<http://www.worldagroforestry.org/af/treedb/>)