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Azadirachta indica A. Juss.

MAHOAGANY FAMILY

Meliaceae

COMMON NAMES

English: Indian lilac, lilac tree, margosa, neem

DESCRIPTION

Medium-sized, usually evergreen tree (to 20 m tall) with trunk to 1 m in diameter; leafy and dense, usually rounded canopy; sometimes shedding its leaves at the end of the growing season.

Bark: Brown when young turning pale grey-brown with deep furrows and scaly plates, flaking in older trees.

Leaves: Glossy green, once-divided (to 40 cm long), 9–17 egg- to lance-shaped leaflets (4–8 cm long), curved and pointed with a broad base, leaf blades unequal, margins roughly saw-toothed; held alternately on the stems, on leaf stalks 2–7 cm long; leaves crowded at the ends of branches.

Flowers: Creamy-white or pale yellow, small, in terminal clusters (to 30 cm long), fragrant.

Fruits: Berries (fleshy fruits that do not open at maturity), initially green turning yellow or greenish-yellow as they mature, oval (20 mm long), containing 1 or 2 seeds.

ORIGIN

Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Myanmar.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Fuelwood, timber, fodder, tannin, medicine, erosion control, restoration, windbreak, shade and ornament.

INVADES

Roadsides, disturbed areas, urban open spaces, pasture, forest edges/gaps, coastal forests and savannah.

IMPACTS

Has the ability to form dense stands, displacing native plant species. *A. indica* is invading natural areas, including savannah and in some cases forests too, in the Middle East, Brazil, Dominican Republic, northern Australia and much of sub-Saharan Africa (Kairo *et al.*, 2003; Freire *et al.*, 2013). According to Chamberlain (2000), neem poses a threat to Ghana's endangered dry coastal forest, where it is displacing rare trees such as *Talbotiella gentii* Hutch. & Greenway (Fabaceae). Chamberlain (2000) further suggests that a reduction in mammalian abundance and diversity on the Accra Plains in Ghana may be the result of *A. indica* invasions. In southern Togo, where neem has invaded a number of forest fragments, it is regarded as the most problematic of invasive species (Radji *et al.*, 2010). *A. indica* infestations in Kenya are considered to be a threat to endemic coastal forests (Hamilton A, World Wide Fund for Nature, Godalming, UK, *pers. comm.*, 2002). In Tanzania, it has invaded the Saadani National Park (Silayo and Kiwango, 2010). Neem is also considered to be one of the worst invasive species in Brazil, where it has invaded coastal, moist and Atlantic dry forest and southern Atlantic mangroves (Zenni and Ziller, 2011). In the east Kimberleys, Australia, 37% of boab (*Adansonia gregorii* Muell.) trees appeared to be threatened by neem trees growing at their bases (Noel Wilson, *pers. comm.*, in NT-WRA on neem, 2007).

NOTES

Recorded as naturalized in Puerto Rico and invasive in the Dominican Republic and St Lucia (CABI, 2020). Invasive on St Martin and in Trinidad and Tobago (Rojas-Sandoval *et al.*, 2017). According to Pratt *et al.* (2009) it is widespread in Antigua and "provides for rapid reforestation, but it can displace other species." In Curacao, Bonaire and St. Maarten it invades dense vegetation, requiring little disturbance (Van der Burg *et al.*, 2012). During our surveys it was found to be present in Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, and St Vincent and the Grenadines; naturalized on St Lucia; and invasive in Antigua and Barbuda, and St Kitts and Nevis.



Azadirachta indica A. Juss.

