

## Morus nigra – Black Mulberry

*Morus nigra*, commonly known as the Black Mulberry, is a deciduous tree growing to some 12m in height and 15m in width. It is found naturally in south west Asia although it has been in cultivation for so long that its precise natural range is not known.

The edible fruit is dark purple, almost black, when ripe, 2 - 3cm long, a compound cluster of several small drupes. It is richly flavoured, similar to the Red Mulberry - *Morus rubra* - but unlike the more insipid fruit of the White Mulberry - *Morus alba*.

The Mulberry is best grown in a warm moist but well-drained loamy soil in a sheltered sunny position. The plants are very tolerant of atmospheric pollutions.

It is a slow growing but very ornamental tree with brittle roots that need to be handled with care when planting them out. Fruit production is maximised by regular pruning although pruning should only be carried out in the winter when the plant is fully dormant because mulberries bleed badly when cut. Ideally prune only badly placed branches and dead wood.

### Propagation

Nature has built in to the seeds of this species a natural dormancy to prevent the seeds germinating in the middle of what the plant believes to be a cold northern hemisphere winter - it needs to be convinced that it has been through winter and can now safely germinate so seeds require 2 - 3 months cold stratification. The seed usually germinates in the first Spring, though it sometimes takes another 12 months. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle and grow them on in an unheated greenhouse for their first Winter. Plant them out in late Spring or early Summer after the last expected frosts.