

Khaya senegalensis – African Mahogany

Khaya senegalensis, commonly known as African Mahogany, is one of the Mahogany timber species from central and west Africa. Its distribution extends from Senegal to the Congo in West Africa, and across the continent to Sudan and Uganda. It is fast-growing and grows to be a large tree some 30m in height with a wide dense crown and a thick grey-barked trunk up to 1.5m in diameter.

It has pinnate leaves in a mid to dark green and up to 25cm in length. In the Summer it produces sprays of small creamy white flowers with yellow stamens. Flowers are followed by fruit - a woody capsule to about 8 cm in length.

In its native habitat it is an important multi-purpose tree and is valued for its timber, as firewood, cattle fodder, shade and shelter tree, a source of edible and cosmetic oils and for medicinal purposes. It is used as a street tree in the tropics (Darwin) but is best known for its attractive and valuable timber and is now being cultivated in tropical regions as a plantation tree for this purpose. It also has the advantage of being termite resistant. African Mahogany is best suited to tropical to sub-tropical sites as it is not frost tolerant.

Propagation

Can be propagated from seed which germinates readily when sown in a sand and peat mix in flat trays. Khaya senegalensis will grow in a wide range of soil types - well drained, coarse sandy loam to poorly drained clay, however, it prefers a neutral pH, and a deep sandy loam soil that is well-drained. It should not be planted in shallow soils as this prevents the large taproot from developing and anchoring the tree. Seedlings can be planted out from 40cm in height and are best in a sunny position to promote rapid growth.