

Adenanthera pavonina – Red Sandalwood Tree

Adenanthera pavonina, commonly known as the Red Sandalwood, Coralwood Tree or the Bead Tree is an attractive deciduous tree growing from to 15m in the wild, but in cultivation is more normally a smaller medium sized tree. It is native to the Indian sub-continent and old-world tropics and is naturalised in northern Australia and much of the tropical New World.

The trunk is basically smooth with many fissures. Leaves are compound bipinnate, green when young, turning yellow when old. The small, yellowish flowers grow in dense drooping racemes, almost like cat-tail flower-heads. Fruits are curved, hanging, green pods that turn brown, coil up and split open as they ripen to reveal small bright red seeds. These attractive seeds have been used as beads in jewellery, leis and rosaries. They were also used in ancient India for weighing gold. The seeds are curiously similar in weight. Four seeds make up about one gram. The pulp of the fruit is used for medicinal purposes.

The young leaves can be cooked and eaten. Although the raw seeds are toxic, when cooked they are edible. The seeds are roasted, shelled, then eaten with rice in South East Asia. The wood is extremely hard and used in boat building and making fine furniture, where its rich dark colour is highly regarded. Red Sandalwood is leguminous and nitrogen -fixing.

Red sandalwood is at its best in tropical to sub-tropical climates in a sunny position in neutral to slightly acid soils. It is frost sensitive.

Propagation

It is propagated from seed that germinate readily when pre-treated by simple scarification (scratched) or soaking for several hours in hot water.

Plant as soon as received at a depth of 2 cm using well draining soil mixture.

Keep damp and always warm with high humidity. Best germination temperature is 20°C plus.

Bright indirect light promotes germination.

Prick out young seedlings into individual tubes and grow on as desired.