

Tamarindus indica – Tamarind

Tamarindus indica, commonly known as the Tamarind, is a large tropical tree with a short massive trunk, ferny pinnate leaves, small yellow flowers and fat reddish brown pods. The tree can get 25m in height but is usually less than 15m in cultivation. It has a short, stocky trunk, drooping branches and a domed umbrella shaped crown about as wide as the tree's height. The leaves are about 25cm in length with 10-18 pairs of 2.5cm oblong leaflets. Tamarind drops its leaves in pronounced dry seasons; in climates without a dry season it stays evergreen.

The flowers are about 2.5cm across, pale yellow with purple or red veins. They have five unequal lobes and borne in small drooping clusters. The velvety cinnamon brown pods are 5 - 15cm long, sausage shaped and constricted between the seeds. The pulp that surrounds the seeds is both sweet and extremely sour.

Tamarinds are grown as ornamental shade or street trees and also for the edible pods. The pods are fed to livestock, and the pulp within the pods is used to make beverages, curries, chutneys and sauces. Tamarind pulp is made into a soft drink known as refresco de tamarindo in Latin America, and tamarinade in Jamaica. It's also the basis of a popular drink in the Middle East. Tamarind is used extensively in Indian and Southeast Asian cuisine and is an important ingredient in Worcestershire sauce. The juice is used to pickle fish in India.

The Tamarind tree is a beautiful, fine textured tree and it makes an excellent shade tree in large landscapes. It often is planted in public parks and as an avenue tree in tropical cities.

It also makes an excellent bonsai subject.

Tamarind is a slow growing tree that, once established, needs no attention at all. It is moderately salt tolerant and can be grown in coastal locations, back away from the actual beach front. It is best in full sun with regular watering. It is fairly tolerant of drought but will drop its leaves during even normal dry seasons.

Propagation

Rootstocks are propagated from seed, which germinate within 4 weeks at 20°C. Seeds will retain their viability for several months if kept dry. Pre-treatment is recommended but not essential, although pre-treated seeds will sprout faster.

Soak seeds in warm water for 24 hours, the outer coating will get soft and remove this to expose the bare seed. You can re-soak the seeds in warm water if they haven't softened the coating or you can plant them as is, but germination will take longer.

Plant seeds 1.5cm deep in containers filled with a soilless type potting media. Sow seed to a depth equal to the narrowest size of the seed.

Maintain media in a lightly moist state.

Prick seedlings out at 10cm and grow on as desired.

Plant out after any danger of frost has passed. (ie so that if the medium is squeezed it yields only a few drops.)



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