

Erythrina falcata



General Information

Erythrina falcata is a spiny deciduous tree with an open, globose crown; it can grow 20 - 30 metres tall. The bole can be 50 - 90cm in diameter

The tree is harvested from the wild for local use as a food, medicine and

source of wood. It can be grown as a pioneer species, especially when establishing woodland in wetter soils. The plant is very ornamental, valued especially for its stunning floral display - it is very suitable for landscaping, planting in parks and large gardens etc, but has been largely ignored

Known Hazards

All Erythrina species contain greater or lesser amounts of toxic alkaloids - these can be found in all parts of the plant but are usually most concentrated in the seeds. Concentrations vary from species to species, in some it is low enough that the plant is safely used as a food. In many, the alkaloids are utilized for their medicinal effects. We have no specific information on the concentration of the alkaloids in this species, but care should be exercised in any use of the plant that involves ingestion. These alkaloids have a curare-like action (obtained from Strychnos species) and can cause paralysis and even death by respiratory failure



Range

S. America - Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru.

Habitat

Semideciduous forests at higher elevations, growing in both dense primary forest as well as in more open and secondary growth areas; favouring very moist to inundated alluvial soils in grassy land at the bases of hillsides

Properties

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| Medicinal Rating |  |
| Other Uses Rating |  |
| Habit | Deciduous Tree |
| Height | 25.00 m |
| Growth Rate | Fast |
| Pollinators | Birds, Insects |
| Self-fertile | N/A |
| Cultivation Status | Ornamental, Wild |

Cultivation Details

A plant of the subtropics to the tropics, more commonly at higher elevations from 1,000 - 3,000 metres but occasionally coming down to lower levels in the tropics.

Succeeds in full sun and also in partial shade

Found in very moist to wet soils in the wild



Young plants establish well and grow away quickly

All species in this genus are believed to be self-compatible. Their flowers are adapted to pollination by birds, though various insects can also cause fertilization. The various species of Erythrina can all, as far as is known, be intercrossed to produce fertile hybrids. Those species most closely related to each other cross fairly readily, but even species that are quite distant can hybridize

This species has a symbiotic relationship with certain soil bacteria, these bacteria form nodules on the roots and fix atmospheric nitrogen. Some of this nitrogen is utilized by the growing plant but some can also be used by other plants growing nearby

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Edible Uses

The flowers are used in Bolivia in the preparation of 'ají de chilicchi', a sweet crème

Medicinal

A tea made from the bark is used in the treatment of asthma

Agroforestry Uses:

A fast-growing plant that fixes atmospheric nitrogen and supplies food for the native fauna, this species can be used as a pioneer when establishing woodland, especially in the moist to marshy soils close to rivers

The nectar in the flowers attracts parrots and parakeets
Most Erythrina species are very easy to grow from cuttings, with even quite large branches striking well. In addition, they generally fix atmospheric nitrogen, have nutrient-rich leaves that make an excellent soil-enriching mulch, often have open crowns that do not overly restrict light, and are also often quite thorny and can provide impenetrable barriers to protect from unwelcome intrusions. Many species are therefore used as living fences to provide boundaries and livestock-proof hedges

Other Uses

The wood is of coarse, homogeneous texture; light in weight; of low durability when exposed to the elements. It can be used for purposes such as matches, wainscoting, toys, soles and heels of shoes, boxes, bowls, boards for indoor division etc

Propagation

Seed - best sown as soon as it is ripe in a partially shaded position in a nursery seedbed or in individual containers. A germination rate in excess of 90% can be expected for fresh seed, with the seed sprouting within 4 - 8 days

Like many species within the family Fabaceae, once they have been dried for storage the seeds of this species may benefit from scarification before sowing in order to speed up germination. This can usually be done by pouring a small amount of nearly boiling water on the seeds (being careful not to cook them!) and then soaking them for 12 - 24 hours in warm water. By this time they should have imbibed moisture and swollen - if they have not, then carefully make a nick in the seedcoat (being careful not to damage the embryo) and soak for a further 12 hours before sowing

