

Pomegranate Tree

Punicaprotopunica



Conservation status

Vulnerable (IUCN 3.1)

Scientific classification

Kingdom: Plantae

(unranked): Angiosperms

(unranked): Eudicots

(unranked): Rosids

Order: Myrtales

Family: Lythraceae

Genus: Punica

Species: P. protopunica

Description.

Punicaprotopunica, commonly known as the pomegranate tree or Socotran pomegranate, is a species of flowering plant in the Lythraceae family. It is endemic to the island of Socotra (Yemen). Its natural habitat is subtropical or tropical dry forests.

The tree, often thorny, attains a height of 2.5 to 4.5 meters. It has reddish-brown bark when young, fading to grey as it ages and becomes less fruitful. Leaves are dark green, glossy and opposite, growing up to 3cm long. Fruit globose, 2-3 cm in diameter. Flowers and fruits from December and January through to the summer.

P. protopunica is considered to be the precursor to the pomegranate (*P. granatum*) and is the only other species in the *Punica* genus. It differs from the pomegranate in having pink (not red), trumpet-shaped flowers and smaller, less sweet fruit. The fruit when ripe are yellow-green or brownish red in color.

As food for humans

The fruit is not an important food on Socotra. The pithy materials lying under the skin and around the seeds of larger ripe fruits is the only part eaten. The seeds are said to be bitter, caustic and to cause sores on the tongue. The skin of the unripe fruit is extremely sour.

As food for livestock

In the well vegetated areas of the island the foliage is little grazed, except in a prolonged dry season, when the fallen dead leaves are eaten. In drier areas, goats eat the leaves and especially the new shoots of smaller and more prostrate shrubs, while sheep eat dry plant litter. It is not palatable to cattle. Goats are fond of the immature fruit. and small stock also like the flowers, fresh or dried.

Medicinal use[edit]

The skins of the fruit are crushed, cooked and the paste applied to treat sores and wounds. Alternatively they are dried and crushed to a powder which is applied topically to treat skin sores in the same way. Occasionally people eat the seeds as a purge to relieve stomach ache. More recently people have started using the

skins to treat stomach complaints and expel worms, a treatment apparently learned from the mainland.

Other uses[edit]

The skin of a pink-colored fruit, rather than a fully ripe red one, is crushed in water and added to a small amount of fresh milk to sour it. The soured milk is then used to ripen fresh milk before churning it to make butter.

Wood[edit]

Hard and close-grained and used to make smaller implements. The straight branches of larger specimens are used to make the important herding staff. Makes good timber and is termite resistant, but it is usually too small to be useful for anything other than roofing infill. Branches are used to make protective or concealing covers for waterholes and rock cisterns. and the wood is considered to be as durable and strong as the wood of *Buxanthuspedicellatus* for this purpose. Dead wood makes good firewood making little smoke and giving out good heat. Dead wood also makes good charcoal.