

Shisham (*Dalbergia sissoo*)

Distribution

Shisham is found in many parts of India up to 900 m in the sub-Himalayan tract and occasionally ascending to 1500 m. It is found in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. In the sub-Himalayan tract, it occurs along rivers and streams, gregariously growing on alluvial soil. It has been widely used for afforestation in most parts of the country except in the very hot, cold and wet tracts. Outside India the species is found in Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma), Malaysia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is also found under cultivation in tropical to sub-tropical Africa and Asia. The tree has been introduced into Java, Nigeria, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Northern Rhodesia, Palestine and South Africa with varying degree of success.

Morphology

A medium sized deciduous tree, 10-30 m tall, trunk 2-4 m in girth at base. Bark is rough with shallow broad longitudinal fissures, exfoliating in irregular woody strips and scales, pale grey or light brown in colour. Leaves of the shisham are compound and each leaflet is light green and thin initially, turning slightly rough and dark green with age. Three or five leaflets form one leaf, each roughly heart-shaped with a finely drawn-out short tip. They are arranged alternately on the leaf stalk, creating a foliar cloud distinct to the shisham. It bears yellowish white flowers which are 7-9 mm long, sessile to pedicellate. Leaf fall takes place generally in November-December, and new leaves appear between January and February. Young flower buds appear along with new leaves. Leaves turn brown prior to falling. Leaflets fall separately. The flowering generally starts in March and April, young pods appear in the end of April all over the tree. The pods turn brown and ripen during November-December.

Utilisation

Because of its strength, elasticity, durability and colour, grain attractive surface, the shisham wood is highly valued for furniture, constructional and general utility purposes. In building it is used in joinery and as posts, rafter, scantlings and boards; for carts and coach building, as felloes, stock, spokes, poles, shafts, body bottoms and footboards. It is also used for gun carriage, boat-building and brush-backs. It is valued also for better class boxes, carved articles, musical instruments, bed legs, trays, ornaments, electric casing, shoe heels, hookah tubes, tobacco pipes, walking-sticks and similar small articles. Shisham wood finds considerable use in the manufacture of certain sports equipments, artificial limbs and jute and textile mill accessories.

Source: Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, Dehradun. Shisham (*Dalbergia sissoo*). Dehradun, Forest Research Institute.