



NOTES FROM THE UNAFAS CVP TREE NURSERY, ON HOW TO GERMINATE AND NURSE USEFUL TREE SPECIES OF CAMEROON

Neem

Scientific Name – *Azadirachta indica*

A small – medium sized tree (15-30 m tall), native to India. It is evergreen, with a spreading, thick crown. It is a good windbreak and shade tree for roadside, compound or boundary planting. It likes light, not shaded conditions but grows almost anywhere in the tropics, except in waterlogged areas. Extensive roots and drought resistance make it good for erosion control. It is also a soil improver.

Biophysical limits: Altitude, 0-1500 m. Mean annual temperature, up to 40°C. Mean annual rainfall, 400-1200 mm. It tolerates most soil types, but does better than most species on poor, shallow, sandy, stony soil.

Young neem trees require weeding, they can not compete with weeds. Trees grow from cut stumps and can be pollarded.

Neem seeds and leaves have many uses, on account of the oil they contain. Dried neem leaves placed with beans, maize or rice prevent damage from weevils. Neem seed or leaves crushed and mixed with water can be used as a pesticide against root and stem borers, ants, aphids, fungi and >300 insect species. It also fertilises soil. The wood is termite resistant: good for furniture making, posts and fences.

Nursery technique

Neem is easy to grow in the nursery, from seed or from root or shoot cuttings. Seeds lose viability within some months, so sow within 3 months of collection.

- Make a seed bed with loose soil at least 40 cm deep. It must not be in a shaded place.
- Place the seeds, evenly, all over the surface, cover with a thin layer of soil.
- Water regularly.
- As soon as the seeds start to sprout place them in individual bags or containers filled with soil.
- The roots are many and fine, easily damaged when transferring to pots.
- Space seedlings so that the leaves do not overlap from one plant to its neighbour.
- Neem does not tolerate water logging or humidity, not in the nursery or when planted out. It does not tolerate very humid environments, which cause mildew to weaken the leaves – in the wet season it is better to plant out seedlings, or to keep them in a sheltered, well ventilated place out of the rain, watering regularly to keep the soil moist, but preventing excess water.
- Seedlings are ready to plant when they are as high as your knee or thigh.