

Jiga, sarh, merro

GENERAL

Origin	: sub-tropical, tropical
Vigour	: slow-growing
Humidity	: very arid, semi-arid
Propagation	: sowing and pricking out
Maintenance	: low

CONDITIONS

Urban climate	: resistant
Dessication	: resistant
Stagnant water	: vulnerable
Irrigation	: low, none
Salinity/ppm	: high (5000 ppm)
Hardiness	: 0°C

SHAPE

Type	: shrub, tree
Height	: 5 m
Spread	: 4 m
Foliage	: evergreen

FLOWER

Colour	: light yellow
Size	: 2 cm
Period	: March - April

FRUIT

Type of fruit	: berry
Fruit size	: 6 cm
Toxicity	: edible

This large shrub, growing up to 5 metres tall, known as sarh or merro in Arabic, is native to the Arabian Peninsula. Its foliage is used as fodder for camels and is a source of food in Africa, where it is made into soups and other dishes. As a widespread, evergreen, and densely branched small tree, usually with a rounded flattish crown, it occurs in drier areas with sandy, gravelly and silty soils. The intricate, glaucous, spiny branches have small simple, often dense, elliptical leaves, which are slightly hairy and about 1 cm long. Yellow-green clusters of flowers with many stamens are borne in spring and the red berry fruits are bean-shaped. The seeds were considered sacred to the ancient Egyptians and there are a number of historical medicinal uses, as well as uses in apiculture. Shrubs are tap-rooted and have a high salt tolerance. In fact, they tolerate very harsh desert conditions, are hardy and withstand wind. The leaves and fruits are palatable to all animals except horses and donkeys The sweet fruits are also used for human consumption. *M. crassifolia* has good potential as a native plant for landscape design: it is useful in afforestation and for creating shelter belts. Requiring only minimal irrigation, whereby deep watering will increase growth, this is a low-maintenance plant.

