

Toothbrush Tree, Arak Tree, meswak, arak

Known in Arabic as meswak or arak, this is the shrub that provides the twigs used as a natural toothbrush. Native to the Hejaz and extremely well-adapted to arid conditions, meswak is widespread, salt-tolerant and very drought-resistant. It is found where groundwater is available, in wadis, in seasonally wet sites, and along drainage lines. *S. persica* is an evergreen, slow growing, small tree or shrub up to 6–7 m high with a crooked, many-branched trunk, and fissured, whitish bark. It has a wide crown of green, crooked branches, and the twigs have a pleasant fragrance. The elliptic to almost circular, rather fleshy leaves have a high salt content and are light to dark green. The small, greenish to yellowish flowers, borne in loose, slender-branched panicles are up to 10 cm long. The edible, spherical, fleshy fruit is 5–10 mm in diameter, bright red when ripe and has a sweet, aromatic taste. *S. persica* prefers sandy soils and areas with high groundwater. Drought-tolerant, deep irrigation in summer will serve to improve the shrub’s appearance. With its high salinity tolerance, it has great potential for reclaiming saline soils. Leaves make good fodder for livestock, since they have a high water content and are rich in minerals. Grown in plantations or hedges, *S. persica* coppices well and is excellent as a shelterbelt, windbreak and in sand dune reclamation. It is prone to some pests and diseases, e.g. *Cistanche tubulosa*, a root parasite, and also defoliating insects. *S. persica* is an excellent desert shrub, requiring no maintenance.



GENERAL

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

CONDITIONS

Urban climate	: resistant
Dessication	: resistant
Stagnant water	: resistant
Irrigation	: low, none
Salinity/ppm	: very high (20000 ppm)
Hardiness	: +3°C

SHAPE

Type	: shrub, tree
Height	: 3 m-7 m
Spread	: 3 m-6 m
Foliage	: evergreen

FLOWER

Colour	: pastel green
Size	: 10 cm
Period	: February - December

FRUIT

Type of fruit	: drupe
Fruit size	: 1 cm