

39

161

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Title	Sunday Times	Date	Page	Key Words
		30/10/05	12	



Twiggy and angular: That's the Masan

The Masan is a fairly small tree usually growing to a maximum height of 4m. The leaves of the Masan are broad and oblong to oval in shape with irregular margins and hairy undersides. At the base of most leaves are prickles, known as stipular prickles because of their location. One of the prickles is curved and one is straight.

D.V.Cowen says that this tree can be difficult to identify because it varies a lot, "not only in size

but in the colour of the leaf and in the size and shape of the fruit. Sometimes the spines at the base of the leaf stalks are pairs, sometimes singly and frequently absent altogether" (in Flowering Trees and Shrubs in India).

The trunk of the tree is branched and is dark grey with deep longitudinal fissures. The wood is pale reddish, heavy and hard and makes good timber.

The flowers of the Masan are greenish white and are tiny but appear in clusters. The fruits are yellow and the shape of a drupe. The size

of a large cherry they have a hard kernel which is surrounded by acidic pulp. These fruits are edible and have medicinal qualities. The syrup of the dried fruit is used for bronchitis.

The Masan is known as

Kakuru in Sinhala, and Illantai or Nari - Illantai in Tamil. The scientific name is Zizyphus jujube and it is commonly referred to as the Common Ju-



jube.

The Masan is found naturally in Sri Lanka, India and in the Philippines. It grows best in the understory of monsoon forests and in the dry lowlands, also in dry regions, even on poor ground. In earlier times it was well known in the areas of Bibile and Nilgala. Here in Colombo a specimen can be seen in the gardens of the Cathedral and in the grounds of Ladies' College.

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