Vachellia nilotica

PEA FAMILY
Fabaceae; Subfamily Mimosaceae

COMMON NAMES
English: gum arabic, Nile thorn, prickly acacia, scented thorn
Indonesia: akasia
Vietnam: keo â ráp

DESCRIPTION
Evergreen thorny tree or shrub [4–6 (~25) m]; usually single-stemmed, crown scattered when young, later umbrella-shaped; thorns greyish (up to 10 cm long); deep and well-developed root system.

Bark: In young trees tinge of orange and/or green; in older trees brown-black, rough and deeply grooved.

Leaves: Dark green, hairless, twice-divided with 3–10 pairs of leaf branchlets (4 cm long), each with 10–25 pairs of leaflets, which are narrow and somewhat elongated with almost parallel sides (2–6 mm long and 0.5–1.5 mm wide); pair of spines (1–5 cm long) at base of each group of leaves in young stems.

Flowers: Pale to golden yellow globular flowerheads (1–1.5 cm across) on 2 cm long stalks, fragrant.

Fruits: Pods (several-seeded dry fruits that split open at maturity), green turning black as they mature, straight or slightly curved (10–20 cm long and 5–17 mm wide), constrictions between each seed in the pod resemble a string of pearls.

ORIGIN
India, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan and Yemen.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Fuelwood, building materials, timber, tools, medicine, chicory-substitute in coffee, fodder, nitrogen fixation, soil conservation, windbreak, firebreak, shade and ornament.

INVADES
Roadsides, disturbed land, urban open space, drainage ditches, irrigation channels, woodland edges/gaps, savannah and natural pasture.

IMPACTS
In Queensland, Australia, tree cover of just 25–30% has reduced the amount of pasture by 50% (Carter, 1994). Dense thickets also make it difficult to herd livestock, and animals have reduced access to water. In Indonesia, A. nilotica in Baluran National Park has reduced the amount of grazing available for herbivores, threatening the continued existence of the endangered banteng (Bos javanicus d’Alton; Bovidae). Infestations also contribute to increase soil erosion. Because the tree fixes nitrogen it also impacts on soil nutrient cycling.
Vachellia nilotica subsp. indica (Benth.) Kyal. & Boatwr.