Ziziphus jujuba var. spinosa
(Bunge) Hu ex H.F. Chow
Rhamnaceae
Source of: suān zǎo rén 酸枣仁
sour jujube seed

Summary Description
This is a deciduous prickly shrub or small tree to 9 feet in height. Like its close relative *Z. jujuba*, source of Chinese red date (dà zǎo), it is being produced in North America with several cultivars available in trade. The correct medicinal variety is close to the wild form, or "unimproved," with small glossy leaves. The tree needs full sun and good drainage but is hardy to Zone 4. It tolerates dry, poor conditions such as roadsides and hillsides. Suckers form readily near the base and can be dug out to propagate the tree, although seed propagation is better to retain genetic diversity and resilience. Prune suckers to retain the tree shape. Small (¼-inch) waxy yellow flowers form in June; they offer an important, timely nectar source for honeybees in the north of China. The tree can take 11 years to form fruit. The fruits are red and round, an inch at most in diameter with thin, sour-tasting skin. The seeds (the medicinal portion) are oblong and less than ¼ inch long.

Propagation
Start in February. Commercial or saved seed will consist of the dried endocarp (shell) with the seed inside. For propagation it is unnecessary to remove the seed. Scarify with hot water, soak 48 hours. Place in a stratification medium and refrigerate 3 months. Sow with potting medium to cover in a deep cell tray and keep moist and warm. Germination should begin in a week but is variable over a three-month period. Transplant into quart pots and hold above freezing until the following spring.

Cultivation
The planting hole should be at least 18 inches deep. Mulch with loose straw or hardwood chips but avoid moisture close to the base of the seedling. This tree is hardy and weedy, and due to its thorns is fairly resistant to predation. Trees can be planted at 2-foot spacing to form a thick, thorny wind break or hedgerow. Plant at six feet apart if pruning to tree shape is desired; such a configuration may make it easier to harvest fruit.

Harvest & Processing
Fruits ripen in September. Dry and crack to remove seed. To store for propagation, remove the skin but leave the dried fruit intact and store in a cool, dry place.

References
Flora of China: http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=2&taxon_id=200013468
Bensky *Materia Medica* page: 926

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A seedling at 13 months, 15 inches long, overwintered in a quart pot

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