

Strychnos spinosa

Lam.

Loganiaceae

LOCAL NAMES

Afrikaans (groenklapper); Bemba (kaminu,sansa,musayi); English (kaffir orange,spiny monkey orange,spiny monkey ball,Natal orange,elephant orange,monkey ball,monkey orange); French (oranger de brousse); Lozi (mukolo,mwimbili); Lunda (mubila,katonga,munkulunkulu,mwijimbe); Ndebele (umhlali); Nyanja (maye,mzai,mzimbili,temya); Shona (mutamba); Swahili (mtonga,mpapa); Tigrigna (lokua,gura); Tongan (muteme,muwi,muono)

BOTANIC DESCRIPTION

Strychnos spinosa is a thorny shrub or small tree 1-9 m in height. Bark grey, rough, tends to flake in rectangular segments but is not deeply fissured or corky; branchlets rather pale and thin, with or without short hairs, with hooked thorns; slash yellowish with green margin.

Leaves elliptic, ovate to almost circular, 1.5-9 x 1.2-7.5 cm, light to dark green and glossy at the base; veins pale green and curving along the margin; apex tapering to rounded, sometimes notched; base tapering, rounded or slightly lobed; margin entire, inclined to be wavy; petiole 2-10 mm long.

Flowers creamy green, up to 6 mm long, in compact heads about 3.5-4 cm, terminal on short lateral twigs, densely crowded together on short stalks about 10 mm long.

Fruit spherical, woody shelled, 5-12 cm in diameter, deep yellow to yellow-brown when mature, contains many flat seeds.

'Strychnos', meaning 'deadly', is an ancient Greek name that was given to a certain poisonous member of the Solanaceae family. Linnaeus, who founded the genus *Strychnos* on the Indian species which yields strychnine, *S. nux-vomica*, possibly associated the deadly qualities of both groups when he named the genus. The specific name 'spinosa' is Latin for spiny.



Strychnos spinosa fruits (Patrick Maundu)



Strychnos spinosa slash (Joris de Wolf, Patrick Van Damme, Diego Van Meersschaut)



Strychnos spinosa foliage (Joris de Wolf, Patrick Van Damme, Diego Van Meersschaut)

ECOLOGY

Occurs in savannah forests all over tropical Africa and grows in open woodland and riverine fringes.

BIOPHYSICAL LIMITS

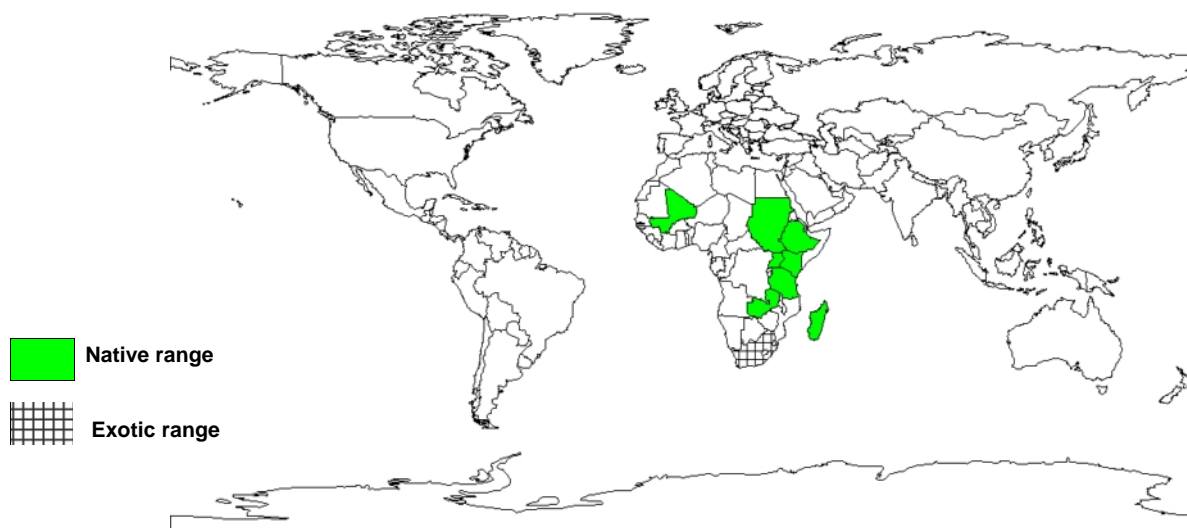
Altitude: 0-1500 m

Soil type: *S. spinosa* occurs on sandy soils along river banks.

DOCUMENTED SPECIES DISTRIBUTION

Native: Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia

Exotic: South Africa, United States of America



The map above shows countries where the species has been planted. It does neither suggest that the species can be planted in every ecological zone within that country, nor that the species can not be planted in other countries than those depicted. Since some tree species are invasive, you need to follow biosafety procedures that apply to your planting site.

PRODUCTS

Food: The sweet-sour fruit pulp is edible but the seeds and unripe fruit are toxic; leaves are also eaten.

Fodder: Leaves of *S. spinosa* are browsed by livestock.

Fuel: *S. spinosa* provides firewood and charcoal.

Timber: The straight-grained wood planes well and is used in furniture making.

Poison: A mixture of ground roots of *S. spinosa* and oil is applied to the skin as a fly repellent.

Medicine: Juice from the fruit and roots is dropped into the ears as a remedy for earache; the roots, leaves and bark are used in the treatment of disorders of the male organs. A decoction of the roots is taken orally for colds or is drunk with milk to cure dropsy. Roots or green fruits are used by the Zulu of South Africa as an antidote for snakebite. The roots alone provide an emetic and also a remedy for fever and inflamed eyes. An analgesic is made from a decoction of the leaves. Jigger fleas are removed from the feet after applying a paste in which the grated root is mixed with oil.

Other products: Sound boxes for musical instruments known as 'mbira' are sometimes made from the shells of dried fruit.

SERVICES

Other services: Parts of the tree are believed to have magical uses ranging from being worn as a hunting charm to extraction of 'bullets' from a magic gun.

TREE MANAGEMENT

S. spinosa roots are pruned to produce root suckers.

GERMPLASM MANAGEMENT

Seed storage behaviour is orthodox; long-term storage. There are about 1800 seeds/kg.

FURTHER READNG

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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