

Adansonia digitata

Bombacaceae

Indigenous

Am: *Bamba*

Eng: *Baobab*

Or: *Ba'obaab, Humaar*

Sm: *Yag*

Gr: *Dima*

Tg: *Hermer banba, Kommer, Momret*

Ecology

A conspicuous and well-known tree in tropical Africa south of the Sahara. In Ethiopia it grows in Bereha and Dry Kolla agroclimatic zones of Tigray and Gonder (common in Tekeze Valley), growing best in moist and well-drained soils. It is deep rooted, drought hardy, and prefers a high water table, 500–1,400 m.

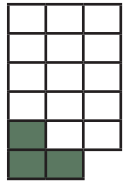
Uses

Fuel (dry fruit cases), carving (utensils, floats, light canoes), food (shoots, leaves, seeds), drink (fruit pulp is high in vitamin C), medicine (fruit pulp, bark, leaves), fodder (leaves, shoots, fruits), bee forage, shade, ornamental, mulch, fibre (young bark, roots), tannin (bark), red dye (roots), water containers, dishes (fruit cases), storage (hollow trees).

Description

A deciduous tree with a thick trunk, diameter may reach 8 m, girth 20 m, and height 25 m. Bare for up to 9 months, the stiff bare branches resemble roots (hence the name “upside-down tree”). **BARK:** Smooth, grey to 10 cm thick, young spongy wood can hold much water. **LEAVES:** Seedlings have simple leaves, mature leaves with up to 9 leaflets. **FLOWERS:** Large and white, opening at night, the unpleasant

smelling nectar attracts pollinating fruit bats. **FRUIT:** Big (15–22 cm), hairy, yellow-brown capsules, hanging on long stalks on the bare tree. Many seeds, within white-pink, dry, edible pulp that contains tartaric acid.



Propagation

Seedlings.

Seed

Seed collection is done in September to October. Seed germination is sporadic in up to three months, but good and well-treated seeds can germinate in 30–50 days. 1,500–2,500 seed per kg.

Treatment: Nick or pour boiling water over seed, remove at once and cool to room temperature. Naturally the seed may take several years to germinate and be induced by fire. Passing through the digestive tract of large mammals such as elephants also breaks seed dormancy.

Storage: Seed can be stored for a long time if kept cool and dry.

Management

The tree is fairly fast growing when young if undisturbed, slow growing when old. Lopping.

Remarks

The baobab is one of the longest living trees — up to 3,000 years. Where baobabs are common, as in the Sahel, every part of the tree is used. Hollow trunks can store large quantities of water. The soft wet wood is hard to carve and fire resistant. The inner bark of young trees is cut to extract strong durable fibres used to make baskets and rope. The bark regenerates and can be cut again in a few years.



Photo: Patrick Maundu



Photo: Maryam Imbuni



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