

Adansonia digitata

reBombacaceae

Indigenous

English: Baobab
Kunda: Muuyu
Nyanja: Mlambe, mkulukumba
Senga: Mubuyu
Tumbuka: Mubuyu

Ecology: A distinctive tree of tropical Africa south of the Sahara, limited to 0–1,000 m. Found all over Zambia except northern areas; common in Luangwa Valley and occasionally also found on the plateau, mainly in woodlands and valleys but also in miombo thickets. It can grow where the water-table is high but is also drought-resistant. Despite its soft inner wood, it can live up to 3,000 years.

Uses: **Food** (shoots, leaves, fruit), drink (seed pulp), medicine (roots, bark), fodder (leaves, fruits), bee forage, **string**, rope (fibres), gum, resin, dye (roots).

Description: A massive deciduous tree to 20 m high, bare for up to 7 months. The circumference around the base can also measure up to 20 m. The **large bare branches**, thin at the tip, look like upturned roots. **BARK:** pink-grey, shiny, later rough and wrinkled. **LEAVES:** found at ends of branchlets, up to 9 **leaflets arranged like fingers of a hand**. **FLOWERS:** **large and white**, opening at night, the unpleasant-smelling nectar attracting pollinating fruit bats, etc. **FRUIT:** large, **hairy grey-green to yellow-brown capsules hang on long stalks all over the bare tree**. They contain about 100 seeds in pink-white floury acid pulp which is edible.

Propagation: Seedlings, cuttings.

Seed: Seed collection is done in April–October. No. of seeds per kg: 1,500–2,500. Good, treated seed can germinate in 30–50 days but the germination rate is usually low.

treatment: Immerse the seed in hot water and allow to cool for 24 hours.

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

Management: Lopping, pollarding, coppicing when young.

Remarks: The spongy inner tissues of the trunk can hold much water which is used by elephants and even people in the driest areas. Old trees are often hollow. The tree is fire-resistant. Considered a sacred tree by many African people. Young leaves can be cooked and eaten as a vegetable. The seed and flower are high in proteins and the kernel contains edible oil.

