

*Agave sisalana*

## Agavaceae

Mexico

**English:** Sisal  
**Kunda:** Khonje  
**Nyanja:** Khonje, gavi  
**Senga:** Khonje

**Ecology:** Introduced to Africa as a plantation crop for the fibres extracted from sun-dried leaves. Widely cultivated around homesteads and dimba (vegetable gardens) on the plateau of Eastern Province. It grows on a wide range of soils from sandy loam to clay, withstands waterlogging and is drought-hardy.

**Uses:** **String**, ropes, sacking, mats (fibres), **live fence**.

**Description:** A woody herb with whorls of spiny leaves at ground level. The flowering stem reaches up to 6 m. **LEAVES:** **sword-shaped, to 2 m long**, edges spiny, with a **sharp dark brown tip**. **FLOWERS:** a flowering "pole" after 7 years has small **green-yellow flowers** on side branches. **FRUIT:** dry capsules with seed but little is viable. Some flower buds become thick and hard and will root when planted. They are called **bulbils** and may **develop among the flowers**. Suckers are produced at the base of the leaves.

**Propagation:** Suckers and bulbils.

**Seed:** Little viable seed.

**treatment:** –

**storage:** –

**Management:** Remove mature leaves that start to die in order to allow young leaves to grow and for the plant to stay healthy. For a good fence, plant one row of sisal on a raised bund with 30 cm between the plants. The fence needs to be maintained by replacing dead plants.

**Remarks:** The whole plant dies after flowering. Leaves for fibres can be cut after about 2 years.

