

Albizia coriaria

Fabaceae (Mimosaceae)

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: Luhya: Omubele; Luhya (Bukusu): Kumupeli, Kumuyebeye; Luo: Ober; Teso: Etekwa.

DESCRIPTION: Usually a large, spreading tree to 15 m, often smaller, trunk twisted. **BARK:** Grey-black rough, flaking. **LEAVES:** Bright green when young, leaflets 6–11 pairs, to 3 cm long, oblong, tip rounded. **FLOWERS:** Very many, sweet-smelling, pink-white, half-spherical heads, stamen threads red above, white below. **FRUIT:** Flat purple-brown pods, often shiny, 10–21 cm, long base pointed, flat rounded seeds about 1 cm.

ECOLOGY: From West Africa to Sudan and south to Angola. In Kenya, only in the Lake Victoria region, 1,140–1,700 m. Widespread in riverine and lakeside forest to open or wooded grassland. Often left in crop fields. Grows in a variety of soils including gravel. Agroclimatic Zones II–III. Flowers in March–May and seeds in October–December in Bungoma.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, timber, furniture, poles, boat building, medicine (roots and bark), fodder, bee forage, shade, ornamental, nitrogen-fixing, toothbrushes, veterinary medicine, leaves used to speed up ripening of bananas.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings.

SEED: Seed is susceptible to beetle attack, often while still on the tree, which lowers germination to 30–40%. A prolific seeder; 14,000–16,000 seeds per kg.

treatment: Not necessary for fresh seed. Nick stored seeds for better germination or soak in cold water.

storage: Seed can be stored for long periods.

MANAGEMENT: Slow growing; lopping, pollarding, pruning.

REMARKS: The species is highly regarded in the Luo community. The heartwood is particularly hard and durable.

FURTHER READING: Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; ITDG and IIRR, 1996; Katende et al., 1995; Kokwaro, 1993.

