Annona cherimola

Annonaceae

Ecuador, Peru

COMMON NAMES: **Digo:** Mtomoko; **English:** Cherimoya, Custard apple; **Giriama:** Mtomoko; **Kamba:** Kitomoko, Mutomoko; **Sanya:** Mtomoko badah; **Swahili:** Mstafeli, Mtomoko, Mtopetope.

DESCRIPTION: A small deciduous tree, 3–10 m, often branched from the base. LEAVES: Alternate, light green, oval and pointed, sometimes narrow, 12–20 cm long with few hairs above but characteristic **golden-brown hairs below**. FLOWERS: Fragrant, usually solitary (or 2–3), hang down on short hairy stalks, 3 outside **petals narrow to 3 cm, pale yellow** with a purple spot at the base, 3 inner petals red-purple, tiny. FRUIT: **Green and compound, 8–15 cm across**, variable, heart-shaped, round or oval with regular **overlapping fleshy scales** or the surface patterned with U-shaped depressions, spirally arranged like fingerprints. The ripe soft flesh is **cream-white, granular**, acid-sweet, easily separated from numerous seeds, each one brown, about 1.5 cm long.

ECOLOGY: A tree growing at 800 m or higher in the Andes of Peru and Ecuador where the well-flavoured refreshing fruit was known to the ancient people of the area. It cannot tolerate a hot lowland climate and is grown commercially in Chile, Spain, USA and New Zealand. In East Africa the name 'custard apple' has been used for 2 different *Annona* species (*A. cherimola* and *A. squamosa*) and hybrids. They grow best in cooler tropical uplands over 1,000 m. *A. cherimola* tolerates lower temperatures for growth and fruiting than *A. squamosa* (custard apple or sweetsop). Agroclimatic Zones I–III.

USES: Edible fruit.

PROPAGATION: All annonas can be grown from seed and cuttings. Budding or grafting is recommended. *A. cherimola* or *A. squamosa* are usually used as rootstock.

SEED: Extracted by hand or after maceration from ripe fruits collected off and below existing trees. Germination takes 2–4 weeks.
treatment: Not necessary.
storage: If stored in cool dry conditions the seed can retain viability for 6–12 months.

MANAGEMENT: Bud or graft. Small beetles usually pollinate the flowers. Hand pollination improves fruit set. Fruit ripens 4–5 months after pollination.

REMARKS: The genus *Annona* belongs to the family Annonaceae and produces aggregate fruits, usually fleshy and edible. Green fruit, seed and leaves of *Annona* spp. are reported to have insecticidal properties. Fruit and seed are effective against worms. Fruit are eaten fresh and the pulp can be used to flavour ice cream. Fruits of annona are commonly seen in markets.

FURTHER READING: Lötschert and Beese, 1983; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Verheij and Coronel, 1993.