

Annona squamosa**Annonaceae****Tropical South America**

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Custard apple, Sweetsop; **Swahili:** Mtopotope, Mtomoko; **Taita:** Matomoko.

DESCRIPTION: A small tree to 7 m, the bole less than 1 m high and up to 20 cm in diameter. Branches spread widely and typically their tip ends bend over or touch the ground. Crown open. **BARK:** Grey with **interlaced pattern of shallow fissures**. **LEAVES:** Simple, alternate, dull green, **long oval in shape, 7–17 cm**, a few hairs below. The tree may keep its leaves or shed them for a brief period each year. **FLOWERS:** Individual flowers produced **singly or in pairs** beside leaves or on the other side of the shoot from a leaf. They **hang down**, yellow-green and **about 2 cm across when open, parts in 3s**. **FRUIT:** **Compound, heart-shaped, 8–10 cm across, surface green-yellow with a papery bloom, having the appearance of scales**. When ripe it has a white pulp containing seeds within each section. The flesh is aromatic with a sugary sweet taste, surrounding the shiny brown-black seeds.

ECOLOGY: A tree that is very widely distributed through the tropics and particularly well known in Africa, Australia and South East Asia. It performs well in lowlands up to 1,200 m with medium rainfall (over 800 mm), and is tolerant of a wide range of soils provided drainage is good. Slightly acid soils (pH 5.5–6.5) are best. Grows well near Lake Victoria. Agroclimatic Zones I–III.

USES: Firewood, edible fruit, ornamental, windbreak.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings (sow seeds in pots). Budding and grafting.

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 retain viability for 6–12 months, although this period is reduced if stored at room temperature.

MANAGEMENT: Plant the trees 5–6 m apart; when combining with mango 10–12 m. Weeding; slow growing. Pick fruit green and slightly unripe and keep it indoors for ripening to avoid bird damage.

REMARKS: A fruit tree worth growing more in Kenya.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Jensen, 1999; Katende et al., 1995; Lötschert and Beese, 1983; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Verheij and Coronel, 1993.

