

# Annona squamosa

*Annonacea*

West Indies, South America

**Common names:** **Eng:** custard apple, sugar apple, sweetsop; **Swah:** mtopetope, mtomoko.

**Ecology:** A tree growing from the West Indies to tropical South America, now cultivated throughout the lowland tropics. In Tanzania widely grown along the coast and semi-wild in Zanzibar. It grows in areas with over 1,000 mm rainfall on Pare, Uluguru and Usambara, Meru and Kilimanjaro mountains, 500-1,200 m. It tolerates most well-drained soils, doing better in slightly acid ones. It can survive drought, but to bear well it needs uniform soil moisture from flowering until harvest time.

**Uses:** Firewood, food (fruit), ornamental, windbreak.

**Description:** A small semi-deciduous tree 3-6 m, the bole short, up to cm diameter. Branches spread widely and the tips bend over or touch the ground. **BARK:** grey with an **interlace pattern of shallow fissures**. **LEAVES:** alternate, thin, dull green, **oval and narrow in shape 7-17 cm** a few hairs below, often held at one level. The tree may shed its leaves in drought. **FLOWERS:** inconspicuous, **usually in groups of 2-4**, sometimes solitary, on a stalk, 3 outer petals fleshy, oblong to 2.5 cm long, green, purple at base; inner 3 petals minute or absent. **FRUIT:** compound, round to heart shaped, **5-10 cm across**, surface green-yellow with a powdery bloom, the **loose rounded sections projecting**. Inside a **yellow-white pulp**, aromatic but sugary, surrounds **shiny dark brown-black seeds**.

**Propagation:** Seedlings.

**Seed info.:** Extracted by hand after macerating ripe fruits collected from and below existing trees. Germination in 2-4 weeks. not necessary.

**treatment:** the seed can retain viability for 6-12 months.

**Management:** Plant the trees 5-6 m apart; when combined with mango 10-12 m. Weed until the canopy suppresses weed growth. Prune to 1 m above the ground to encourage secondary branching and to maintain quality.

**Remarks:** The fruit is 50-80% edible and the pulp contains more vitamin C than grapefruit. The tree is affected by root rot and several insect pests. Ripe fruit are cut from the tree when a cream colour develops between the fruit sections. The sugar apple bears more fruit than cherimoya or atemoya—10-15 tonnes per hectare—grown in the Philippines and Thailand.

