

Bombax rhodognaphalon

Bombacaceae

Indigenous

STANDARD/TRADE NAME: East African bombax.

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Wild kapok, East African cotton tree;
Giriama: Mware; **Somali:** Get suuf; **Swahili:** Mkaranga mti,
Msufi mwitu; **Sanya:** Bamba.

DESCRIPTION: A tall tree to 36 m with a straight bole and medium crown. **BARK:** Yellow-green, smooth. **LEAVES:** Compound with 3–7 leaflets like fingers of a hand, each to 4 cm long. **FLOWERS:** 5 petals, pale yellow, red or white, numerous anthers with red stamens; calyx bell-shaped. **FRUIT:** Oval brown woody capsule about 6 x 3 cm, which splits open to set free many seeds in dark red-brown fluffy kapok.

ECOLOGY: Distributed in West Africa, East Africa and Central Africa south to Angola. In Kenya, it occurs only in the coastal areas in evergreen forests, forest margins and forest remnants or in coastal bushland, 0–350 m. Prefers clay soil but also grows in soils derived from coral. Agroclimatic Zones II–IV. Seeds throughout the year.

USES: Timber (soft), carving, boat building (canoes), drums, edible seed, medicine (bark and leaves), shade, ornamental, avenue tree, river-bank stabilization, fibre (bark), dye (bark), boundary marking, stuffing for pillows and mattresses, hollows made in the trunk for storing dry food and honey.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings; easily propagated by seed.

SEED: 15,000–20,000 seeds per kg.

treatment: Not necessary.

storage: Seeds susceptible to insect attack. Remains viable for some months if insects can be kept away.

MANAGEMENT: Fast growing.

REMARKS: A good food tree in coastal areas. A red-brown dye is obtained from the bark.

The seeds can be roasted and eaten like groundnuts. The roasted seeds can also be pounded and the powder used for cooking with vegetables or meat.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002.

