

Borassus aethiopum**Areaceae (Palmae)****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Boni:** Ong; **Digo:** Mvumo, Dzova, Ngolokolo (fruit); **Duruma:** Mvumo; **English:** African fan palm, Borassus palm, Palmyra palm; **Giriama:** Mugumo; **Malakote:** Murifate; **Orma:** Marafa; **Pokomo:** Mutapa; **Sanya:** Marafa; **Somali:** Mardafa (Tana River); **Swahili:** Mchapa, Mtapu, Mvumo; **Teso:** Edukut.

DESCRIPTION: Tall unbranched palms, to 25 m, sometimes even higher. **TRUNK:** Smooth to rough, grey, **thickened above the middle**. Leaf scars prominent immediately below crown, less prominent further down. **LEAVES:** **Large, fan-shaped**, to 4 m long by 3 m across, deeply divided into leaflets. **Edge of leaf stalk with curved teeth**. **FLOWERS:** Male and female on different trees, males producing branched spikes to 2 m carrying the pollen. **FRUIT:** In large bunches, **big, up to 15 cm long by 12 cm wide, round or slightly egg shaped, orange to orange-brown, cupped in the enlarged calyx, smooth**, containing up to 3 seeds surrounded by a fibrous edible pulp.

ECOLOGY: A palm tree widespread throughout the less dry areas of tropical Africa. It needs a high water table and is normally found along watercourses, often singly. In Kenya, commonly found at the coast, lower Tana and in the Shimba Hills. Open grassland with a high water table, along watercourses, flood plains or on coastal coral sands, e.g. at Madunguni (Kilifi), Gede Ruins and Tana River Primate Reserve. Also in western Kenya and around Mandera, 0–1,400 m. Agroclimatic Zones III–IV.

USES: Poles, timber, tool handles, edible fruit, flavouring other food, palm wine, vegetable (very young seedlings), ornamental, avenue tree, fibre, thatch, mats, baskets, dye, oil.

PROPAGATION: Direct sowing at site; seedlings.

SEED: 2–3 seeds per kg. Best to use fresh seed. If they are to be dried, this should be under shade to avoid excessive heat from the sun on one side of the seed. The seed can be sown without removing the pulp surrounding it. Best to germinate seed in a big pot. As soon as the 'root' starts showing, plant carefully at site. The 'root' will carry the embryo down into the ground, perhaps to the water table, then the first leaf will grow up to the soil surface. Keeping the germinated seed in the pot for later transplantation does not work well. Germination usually takes about a month.

treatment: Not necessary.

storage: Seed dried in shade remain viable for about 2–3 months.

MANAGEMENT: Slow growing. Takes about 40 years to reach maturity for flowering, and the rotation period can be as much as 140 years.

REMARKS: Exploitation of the tree for its sap (palm wine) has made the tree

rare. Elephants eat the fruits and thus contribute to the distribution of the tree. A useful palm whose full potential has yet to be realized in Kenya. The wood is hard and heavy and resists termites and fungi. Leaves vibrate loudly in the wind.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Beentje, 1994; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Dharani, 2002; Katende et al., 1995, 1999; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979; von Maydell, 1990.

