

Ceiba pentandra**Bombacaceae****Tropical America and Africa**

COMMON NAMES: **Digo:** Msufi; **English:** Kapok tree, Silk-cotton tree; **Swahili:** Msufi.

DESCRIPTION: A tall deciduous tree up to 30 m or more with conspicuous **horizontally layered branches**, the trunk covered with sharp conical spines when young, **heavily buttressed with age**. **BARK:** Young branches green, old bark grey, smooth. **LEAVES:** Compound, **5–15 leaflets** radiating from a long stalk, to 20 cm, each leaflet long and narrow, 8–16 cm. **FLOWERS:** Small, to 3 cm across, pink-white, in clusters, 5 petals, silky hairy outside; pollinated by bats when the flowers open in the evening. **FRUIT:** Large **woody capsules to 30 cm**, conspicuous on the bare tree; contain rounded **black seeds with long silky white fibres ('kapok')**.

ECOLOGY: A distinctive tree, widely found in the tropics. In Kenya, planted at the coast. Agroclimatic Zones I–III. Trees flower in August, fruit emerges in September and seed ripens in December.

USES: Firewood, timber, edible fruit (when young), medicine (bark), fodder (leaves and shoots), bee forage, shade, ornamental, soil conservation, fibre from fruit (life jackets, stuffing mattresses), oil (seed).

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, cuttings.

SEED: Fruit are collected, dried in the sun and seeds are separated from the floss by shaking the open fruit in a bag; 10,000–45,000 seeds per kg. Germination rate is 50–85%. Seeds are wind dispersed.

treatment: Soak seed in cold water for 24 hours.

storage: Seeds are oily but can be stored for up to a year in normal conditions.

MANAGEMENT: Coppicing, lopping and pollarding.

REMARKS: Kapok fibre burns easily but is water repellent and lighter than cotton. This tree grows naturally in both America and Central Africa. In the wetter parts of Africa it may reach a height of 60 m. The trunk is made into canoes. In its native areas, the tree is normally pollinated by small mammals.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Dharani, 2002; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Jensen, 1999; Katende et al., 1995; Löttschert and Beese, 1983; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave, 2002.

