

Ceiba pentandra

Bombacaceae

South and Central America

Common names: **English:** Kapok tree **Luganda:** Kafamba, kifampa.

Ecology: A distinctive tree, widely found in the tropics. An important crop, e.g. in Malaysia and Sri Lanka where unripe fruit and seed oil are used as food. In Uganda it is intercropped with coffee and tea and also planted as an avenue tree.

Uses: Fodder (leaves, shoots), medicine, ornamental, fibre (mattresses).

Description: A tall deciduous tree up to 30 m 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").

Propagation: Seedlings (sow seed in pots), cuttings.

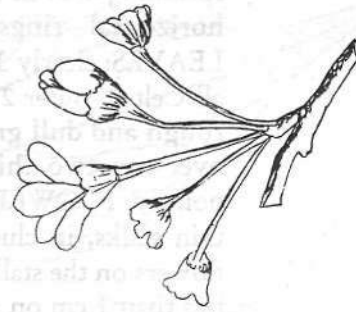
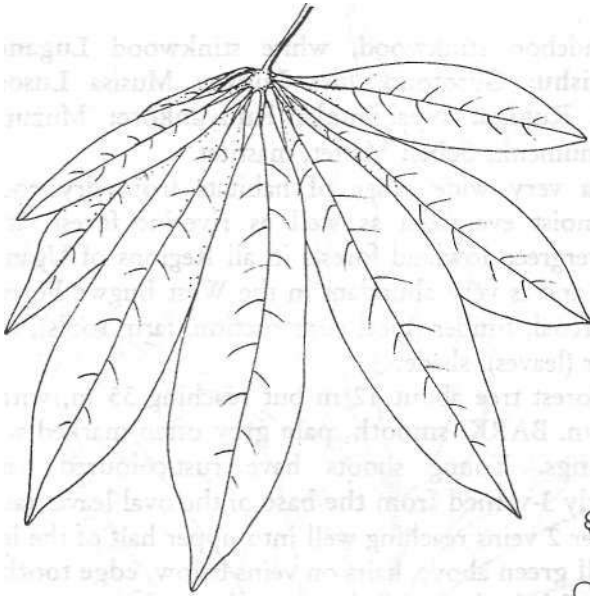
Seed: No. of seeds per kg: 10,000-45,000. Germination rate is 50-85%.

treatment: soak seed in cold water for 24 hours.

storage: can retain viability up to one year at room temperature.

Management: Fast growing. Coppicing, lopping and pollarding.

Remarks: Kapok fibre burns easily but is water repellent and lighter than cotton. The wood is so soft it has few uses. The tree is very shallow rooted and easily damaged by high winds. Kapok is little used nowadays since plastic foam is used for most stuffing and mattresses.



fruit capsule & seed

A. Birnie

