

Colophospermum mopane

Caesalpinioideae

Indigenous

English: Mopane, turpentine tree

Nyanja: Mupane, tsanya, chanye

Senga: Lupani

Ecology: A tree restricted to the hot lowlands of Central Africa, 0–1,200 m. In Zambia, it is a dominant tree in the major river valleys, including Luangwa and in Chama District, often seen in pure stands, “mopane woodland”. It tolerates poorly drained clay and alkaline soils better than most trees.

Uses: **Firewood, charcoal, timber (construction), poles, medicine** (bark, roots).

Description: A tall deciduous tree to 20 m, with a tall and straight trunk; crown small and dense. **BARK:** grey-black, thick, ridged with deep cracks. When damaged it exudes gum. **LEAVES:** easily recognized, **2 leaflets** together, like butterfly wings, each leaflet up to 10 × 5 cm, stalk to 4 cm. Crushed leaves smell of turpentine. **FLOWERS:** pale green, in sprays, December–March. **FRUIT:** flat **leathery** pods, **golden-brown, kidney-shaped**. The single seed within is wrinkled and sticky. It can germinate inside the pod which does not break open.

Propagation: Seedlings, wildings.

Seed:

treatment: Not required.

storage: Can be stored.

Management: Coppicing.

Remarks: The dark red-brown heartwood is heavy and termite-resistant. An edible caterpillar (*Gonimbrasia helina*) feeds on the leaves. These colourful “mopane worms” are eagerly collected and roasted. The tree remains bare in winter. The thick bark is fairly fire-resistant. Leaves characteristically hang down during the heat of day and so provide little shade. Mopane is an indicator of poorly drained shallow soil; unsuitable for crops. It makes excellent fuelwood (firewood and charcoal).

