

*Diospyros mespiliformis*

## Ebenaceae

Indigenous

**English:** African ebony  
**Nyanja:** Mchenja, mvimbe, mchenjamusumu  
**Senga:** Mchenja  
**Tumbuka:** Mnchenja

**Ecology:** A tree widespread in Africa from Senegal to Kenya and to South Africa. In Zambia, it is scattered throughout the country on termite mounds, along river banks and in most types of woodland at low to medium altitudes.

**Uses:** Firewood, **timber** (construction, carvings, furniture), **food** (fresh fruit, fermented drink), medicine (bark, roots, fruits), bee forage, shade, ornamental.

**Description:** A semi-evergreen tree, usually 10–15 m; the bole clear to a dense rounded crown. **BARK:** grey-black, rough and squared. **LEAVES:** shiny dark green, **alternate to 14 cm long, the midrib raised below, the edge wavy, tip rounded.** **FLOWERS:** fragrant; male clustered, female solitary cream-white; the stalk with woolly hairs. **FRUIT:** rounded to 2.5 cm in a calyx cup, the 5 segments curling back, yellow then purple, pulp soft and sweet containing 4–6 seeds.

**Propagation:** Seedlings.

**Seed:** Good germination. No. of seeds per kg: 2,700–3,200.

**treatment:** Not necessary.

**storage:** Seed can be stored for many years.

**Management:** Coppicing, pruning.

**Remarks:** *Diospyros* spp. produce the valuable black heartwood “ebony”, very popular for wood carving. Only a few trees yield the black wood after felling; pale at first, the timber gradually becomes dark brown. The wood is hard, strong, with a fine grain and is fungus- and termite-resistant. Slow growing. The leaves are used to treat fever and for dressing wounds. Bark and roots are used for treating malaria, syphilis and leprosy. Different parts of the tree are used to treat headache, toothache and other body pains.

