

Indigenous

Trade name: Wild oil palm

Common names: **English:** Guinea oil palm **Kwamba:** Esa, mba **Luganda:** Mubira, munazi.

Ecology: A palm found throughout the wetter parts of Africa; origin centred in West Africa. It was introduced to Java in 1848 and is now economically important in Malaysia as well as in West Africa. In East Africa the palm is confined to some habitats in Tanzania, irregularly along the coast and in Uganda in the swamp forests of Bundibugyo District (900 m) and in high-rainfall gallery-forest in Mongiro Forest of the eastern Semliki valley (760 m).

Uses: Food (oil), drink (wine), medicine (oil), ornamental (avenue tree).

Description: A thick palm, usually to 15 m, the wide bole 30-50 cm in diameter **covered with the remains of leaf bases. A massive untidy crown of shiny, drooping leaves**, loose brown fibres at the base. LEAVES: large and pinnate, 3-4 m, 40-50 in a mature crown. The leaf stalk bears **100-150 folded leaflets each side growing out irregularly in two planes**, the whole leaf feathery, about 120 cm long and 8 cm across. Leaf stalks wider at the base with sharp fibre-spines along the edge. FLOWERS: arise beside leaves, often before a trunk develops. The **massive golden flowering heads, 15-20 cm, male or female**. Male flower tiny, aromatic and yellow; female almost round, larger, central joined styles-stigma 1 cm across. FRUIT: just above the short trunk, **big bunches, each fruit shiny, bright orange, 3-5 cm**, upper parts dark red to black, tipped by old style. Below the outer skin is a yellow oil-rich layer 5-10 mm thick. One dark seed lies in the centre, also rich in oil.

Propagation: Seedlings (sow seed in pots), wildings and direct sowing at site. Natural regeneration is common.

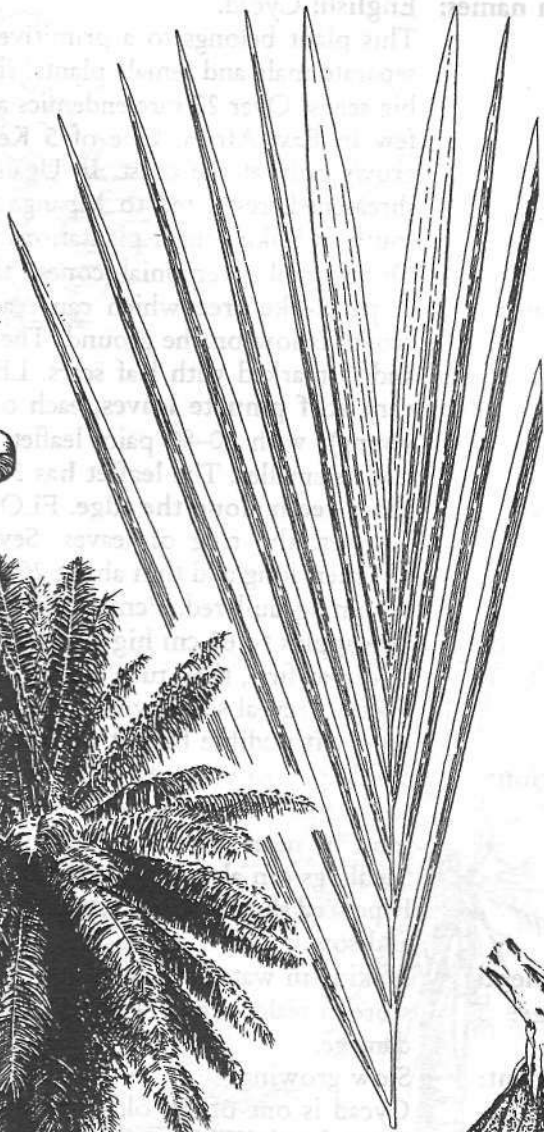
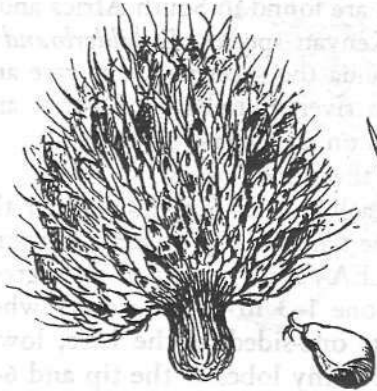
Seed: Collect fruit from the big bunches as soon as they are ripe. Remove the outer coat to set free the stony seed, the seed can be cracked or nicked to hasten germination.

treatment: The seed is very oily so quickly loses viability. Sow seeds fresh.

storage: Initial tending is necessary in plantations.

Management: Orange palm oil from the outer flesh is moderately unsaturated; more valuable saturated oil comes from the seed kernel. These are a major world source of vegetable oils and are processed for cooking, soap and margarine manufacture and are a major ingredient in many food products. Palm wine is made from the sugary sap tapped near the growing stem tip, from the flower head or the base of the stem. In plantations, the tree bears fruit in 3-4 years and continues for about 25 years. In Malaysia a weevil which carries pollen from male to female flower heads has been introduced and greatly increased yields. The wood is not durable in the ground.

female head
and fruit



male
flower
head

