

Ensete ventricosum* (*E. edule*)*Musaceae****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Wild banana; **Kamba:** Ikulutui; **Kikuyu:** Ihindu; **Kipsigis:** Sasuriet; **Kisii:** Getembe; **Maasai:** Olmusalala; **Marakwet:** Sosurwa; **Meru:** Gikobo, Mukoko; **Nandi:** Sasuriet; **Taita:** Isengeru.

DESCRIPTION: A leafy herb 6–12 m, swollen below, the 'false stem' (pseudostem) is formed by the leaf bases. **LEAVES:** Large leaves grow in spirals, each one to 6 m long and 1 m wide, bright green with a thick pink-red midrib and a short red stalk. The leaf blades tear with age. **FLOWERS:** In large hanging heads 2–3 m long, the white flowers with 1 petal protected by large dark red bracts, 5 stamens produce sticky pollen. **FRUIT:** Although the small yellow clusters look like normal bananas they are not edible. Each leathery fruit, about 9 cm long, contains many hard seeds, brown-black, to 2 cm long with only a thin layer of pulp. **The whole plant dies back after fruiting.**

ECOLOGY: Like the common banana, this fleshy tree is a giant herb. It also grows in Cameroon, Central Africa and Sudan south to South Africa. In Kenya it is widespread in highland areas such as Loita, Saiwa Swamp, Kericho Highlands, Kasigau Hill and Kilungu Hills. It grows in wet upland valleys and ravines and along streams in the forests of lower mountain slopes; 1,000–2,400 m. Agroclimatic Zones II–III.

USES: Medicine (pseudostem), fodder (pseudostem), shade, ornamental, thatch (leaves), fibre (midrib of leaf), dye (pseudostem), decoration (seeds for beads), wrapping material (leaves).

PROPAGATION: Wildings and seedlings; produces suckers that can be used for propagation.

SEED: Seeds are contained in the finger-like fruit and on ripening they are set free. Usually high germination rate. Sow seed in pots.

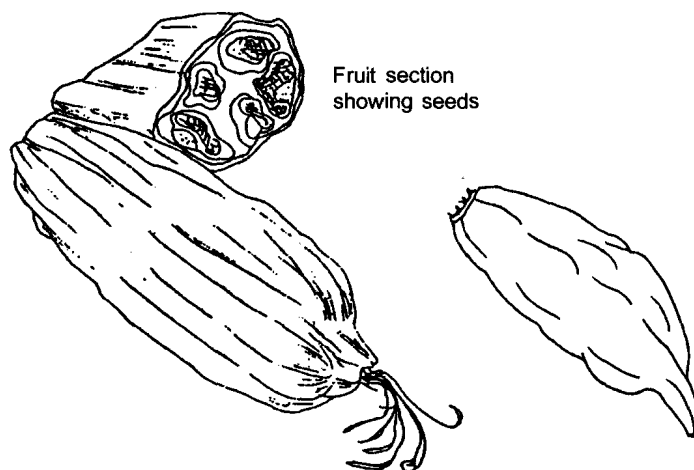
treatment: No treatment.

storage: If needed, store seed in sealed containers in a cool place.

MANAGEMENT: Fast growing.

REMARKS: *Ensete* differs from *Musa*, the true banana, in the terminal head of flowers, its large seeds and by dying after fruiting. The leaf blades make a good durable thatch and the midrib a strong fibre for rope or sacking. Pollination is commonly brought about by bats transferring the sticky pollen. Plant as single trees in the compound. The seeds are used as decorative strings. This plant is commonly seen as an ornamental in urban areas. It has been cultivated in south-western Ethiopia for thousands of years to produce a starchy product from the pseudostem, corms and stem of flowering branches. The product, which is obtained after fermentation in a pit, is made into a kind of pancake, bread and porridge.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Dharani, 2002; Katende et al., 1995; Kokwaro, 1993; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990.



Fruit section showing seeds

