

Ensete ventricosum (E. edule)

Musaceae

Indigenous

Common names: **English:** Wild banana **Luganda:** Kitembe.

Ecology: Like the common banana, this fleshy tree is a giant herb. It also grows in the Sudan, East and Central Africa and in a few suitable places in South Africa. It grows in wet upland valleys and ravines and along streams in the forests of lower mountain slopes, and in Uganda also in moist valleys on the western side of Lake Victoria, 1,000-2,400 m. Found in Kalinzu Forest, Wabitembe Forest, Masaka and in Kigezi.

Uses: Medicine (stem), ornamental, thatch (leaves), fibre (midrib of leaf).

Description: **A leafy herb 6-12 m, swollen below**, the "false stem" 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 down after fruiting.**

Propagation: Wildings and seedlings (sow seed in pots).

Seed: Seeds are contained in finger-like fruits and on ripening they are set free.

treatment: no treatment.

storage: store in sealed containers in a cool place.

Management: Fast growing.

Remarks: Ensete differs from Musa, the true banana, in the terminal head of flowers and by dying after flowering. 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 and also used in the game of "mweso" (Luganda). In Acholi the seeds are eaten.

