

*Erythrina abyssinica*

## Papilionoideae

Indigenous

**English:** Lucky bean, red-hot-poker tree

**Nyanja:** Mulunguti, mwale

**Ecology:** A small thorny tree, native to warm temperate and tropical areas of Africa, Central America, Australia, Southern Asia to Hawaii. Found throughout Eastern Province, especially on anthills in open wooded grasslands.

**Uses:** Firewood, timber (carving, beehives, mortars, drums), **medicine** (bark, roots), fodder (leaves), bee forage, mulch, **nitrogen fixation**, soil conservation, **ornamental** (necklaces and curios from seeds), ceremonial purposes.

**Description:** A deciduous tree with a short trunk, 6–12 m, and thick spreading branches, rounded crown. **BARK:** brown, **thick and corky**, often with woody spines. **LEAVES:** **trifoliate**, the largest leaflet rounded to 15 cm, branchlets and underside of leaves covered with **soft grey-brown hairs**, veins and stalks sometimes with sharp prickles. **FLOWERS:** **brilliant orange-red heads**, all over the bare tree, slender **calyx lobes and petals coloured**. **FRUIT:** small, hairy pods to 10 cm, **constricted between seeds, seeds shiny red** with a black patch.

**Propagation:** Seedlings, cuttings, direct sowing at site. Propagation from cuttings is successful if done immediately after the rainy season.

**Seed:** Low germination rate. No. of seeds per kg:  $\pm 6,800$ .

**treatment:** Not necessary.

**storage:** Seed stores for many years.

**Management:** Pollarding, coppicing.

**Remarks:** The tree is highly regarded for its medicinal properties (i.e. bark and roots). The seeds are used in children's games. Resistant to fire and termites as the young trees establish a deep root system before stem growth. Slow growing. The bark of young trees is used to treat trachoma. It is also roasted and applied to burns and swellings. Powdered root is used to cure syphilis, anthrax and snakebite.

