

Indigenous

Common names: **English:** Bark-cloth fig **Luganda:** Mutuba **Lugwere:** Tera **Luo J:** Kiditi **Lusoga:** Mugaire, kiryanyonyi **Runyankore:** Mutooma, ekitooma.

Ecology: A common African fig tree found from West to East, northern Zambia to South Africa. It grows in both wet and dry forest and thickets, in riverine and ground-water forests in higher rainfall woodland and savanna, 10-2,200 m. The tree has been cultivated in all regions of Uganda. It often begins life as an epiphyte then becomes a strangler and replaces the host tree, but may also be quite terrestrial.

Uses: Medicine (leaves), shade, live fence, bark cloth.

Description: An evergreen shrub or tree usually 12 m but up to 30 m with upright branches to a dense drooping crown. Aerial roots may hang down from the branches and the base of the trunk is often a mass of interwoven roots. **BARK:** pale grey, thin and smooth. **LEAVES:** rather stiff, long oval, often wider at the tip, about 6 cm (2.5-10 cm) long, tip rounded or shortly pointed, 5-10 veins on either side, on a **stalk 0.5-2.0 cm long**. **FIGS:** in pairs beside or just below leaves on stalks 2-10 mm, rounded yellow-red when ripe 8-18 mm across, 2 mm long, bracts at the base fall off (unlike *F. thonningii*).

Propagation: Large cuttings, seedlings.

Seed: Seed is contained in the figs which dry without releasing the seed. The figs should be crushed so the seeds are released before sowing in the nursery.

treatment: not necessary.

storage: whole figs can be stored provided insect attack is avoided. Add ash to reduce insect damage.

Management: Fast growing.

Remarks: Barkcloth used to be made from this tree throughout Uganda. A cylinder of bark is removed in one piece then softened with steam. An 18-inch strip of bark can be beaten with a mallet into a piece of cloth over 7 feet wide. Each household had its own trees and each tree could yield 40 bark strippings. The naked stem of the tree was immediately wrapped in banana leaves. The leaves are used to treat dysentery and sore throats. The tree is also grown as a live fence around homes and at a wide spacing for shade in coffee, cocoa and banana plantations.

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