

Jatropha curcas

Euphorbiaceae

Tropical America

Trade names: Pig nut, fig nut, physic nut.

Common names: **English:** Pig nut, fig nut, physic nut **Luganda:** Kiryowa **Lusoga:** Kilowa.

Ecology: One of 150 *Jatropha* from tropical America with a few African species. This species was introduced to Africa centuries ago and is now naturalized in drier areas in many countries. It is a decorative plant frequently planted as a live fence around homesteads or used as a boundary or grave marker. In Uganda it is widely cultivated as a boundary hedge and grown scattered in coffee and banana plantations.

Uses: Medicine (roots, seeds), live fence, support to climbing vanilla.

Description: An erect, stiffly branched **succulent shrub** or small tree 3-4 m. **BARK:** thin and yellow-grey with a papery peel; an unpleasant milky sap when cut. **LEAVES:** **alternate and simple with 3-5 shallow lobes, to 15 cm long**, widely rounded at the base on a **stalk to 16 cm**. **FLOWERS:** **small, yellow-green, shortly stalked** on branched heads with a shorter stalk than the leaves. **FRUIT:** **ovoid capsules, slightly 3-angled 2.5-4.0 cm long**, black when ripe, containing **3 mottled seeds**. When crushed the seeds produce a yellow oil.

Propagation: Seedlings, cuttings.

Seed: Collect when capsules split open.

treatment: cracking the seed slightly improves germination.

storage: seeds are oily and do not store for long. Use fresh seed for best germination.

Management: Fast growing. Pruning, trimming as a hedge.

Remarks: The name *Jatropha* comes from two Greek words meaning physician and food. The oil has purgative properties but seeds are poisonous: even the remains from pressed seeds can be fatal.

