

Lonchocarpus capassa

Papilionoideae

Indigenous

English: Lilac tree, rain tree
Nyanja: Chimpakasa, mswaswa
Senga: Chiwalawala

Ecology: A tree of central and southern Africa, north to Tanzania, with a useful timber. It grows near water in most parts of Zambia at low to medium altitudes, but not in evergreen forest, and prefers well-drained soils. Abundant nectar makes the flowers attractive to bees. The tree is a reliable indicator of groundwater.

Uses: **Timber** (utensils), food (seeds), **medicine** (roots), fodder (leaves), bee forage.

Description: A semi-deciduous tree about 10 m high with a rounded but open crown and drooping branches. **BARK:** light grey, smooth becoming rough. The sap is crimson-red. **LEAVES:** compound, 1–2 pairs of grey-green **leaflets** plus a central larger **leaflet to 15 cm**, leaf tip rounded. Leaf stalks are short and hairy. **FLOWERS:** **pink-purple**, in sweet sprays to 30 cm long, August–December. **FRUIT:** flat grey–cream pods, to 15 cm, with **one side wing-like** (May–October), 1–5 kidney-shaped seeds are set free when the pod rots on the ground.

Propagation: Seedlings.

Seed: No. of seeds per kg: $\pm 5,000$. Germination is good and fast.

treatment: Soak in cold water for 24 hours.

storage: Can retain viability for a long time at room temperature.

Management: –

Remarks: These trees are observed to drip water some weeks before the rainy season, between August and September. Froghoppers (*Ptyelus grossus*) invade the trees and the insect's nymphs suck the sap. Afterwards, they excrete almost pure water which falls on the ground below causing a patch of grass to grow; conspicuous in the dry landscape. They are sensitive to fire. Seeds are only eaten in time of famine. Rotenone, used in the insecticide "Derris", is extracted from the roots. The timber is strong, fairly hard and heavy. Root extracts are used to treat stomach-ache, hookworm and coughs.

