

Maesopsis eminii

Rhamnaceae

Indigenous

STANDARD/TRADE NAME: Mutere, Musizi.

COMMON NAMES: Luhya: Mutere, Muhunya.

DESCRIPTION: A leafy semi-deciduous tree 10–30 m, often with a clear bole to 10 m, the **branches rather horizontal, the crown flattened when young but more rounded with age**. **BARK:** Pale grey-brown to silvery grey, branchlets dotted with breathing pores, grooved with age. Slash red and yellow. **LEAVES:** Appear as though compound but in fact alternate on the twig, **on stalks to 1 cm, each long and shiny, pointed, to 14 cm, the edge with characteristic well-spaced rounded teeth**. **FLOWERS:** Small and green in heads beside leaves. **FRUIT:** Egg-shaped with the widest end towards the tip, to 3 cm long, fleshy and yellow, turning purple, with 1–2 hard seeds.

ECOLOGY: A large timber tree typical of rainforest from West and Central Africa and reaching its natural eastern limit in the Kakamega Forest area, 1,550–1,650 m. Widely planted in wetter highland districts of western Kenya and north-eastern Tanzania. It has also been grown in the Taita Hills, mainly as a timber tree. The species is invasive in the East Usambaras in Tanzania where it was introduced in the early part of the last century. There, it easily replaces other species in the gaps in this submontane evergreen forest at 800–1,200 m altitude. Agroclimatic Zones I–II.

USES: Firewood, timber (light construction), furniture, poles, veneer, medicine, fodder (fruit), shade (for tea and coffee), ornamental.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings, direct sowing at site.

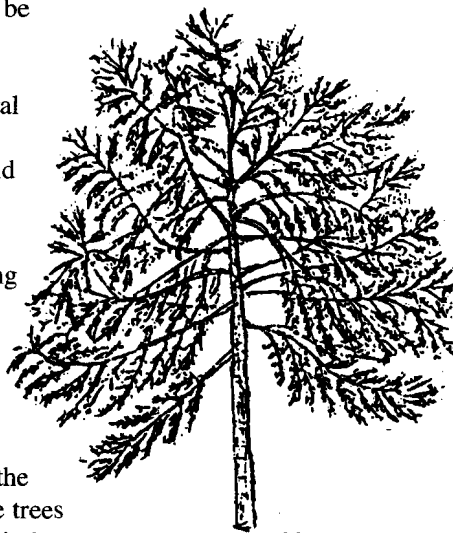
SEED: About 700 seeds per kg; germination rate up to 70% but often much lower. After collection the seeds are extracted from the pulp by soaking in water for 24 hours and then rubbing and washing them so that the pulp is torn away. The seeds can then either be dried and stored or sown immediately. Germination is slow: up to 70 days.

treatment: None for fresh seed, dried seeds should be nicked at the distal end.

storage: Seed can be stored for up to 5 months at room temperature, several years in airtight containers in a cold store.

MANAGEMENT: Fast growing; coppicing while young.

REMARKS: Although the species can be intercropped, maize production is affected due to the heavy shade as the trees grow bigger. The timber



Young tree

is not resistant to fungi or termites so rots quickly. Hornbills and chimpanzees eat the fruit and disperse the seed. This species is internationally listed as an invader, so care with further spread is called for, although in its natural habitat in Kakamega Forest it is not particularly abundant. The famous Mama Mutere tree, the highest in Kakamega Forest at over 40 m, belongs to this species. This is the only species in the genus *Maesopsis*.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Albrecht, 1993; Beentje, 1994; Katende et al., 1995; Mbuya et al., 1994; National Academy of Sciences, 1983; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990; Storrs, 1979.

