

Moringa oleifera

Moringaceae

India, Arabia

Eng: Ben-oil tree, Cabbage tree, Horse-radish tree

Ecology: Native to the western Himalayas and India, this tree is now planted all over the tropics and has become naturalized in some places. It prefers low altitudes on well-drained sandy soils with a high watertable, but is also drought-resistant. Introduced to Eritrea, a very few trees are found in Solomuna at the foot of the eastern escarpment (green belt), 500-750 m.

Uses: **Food** (young leaves, young fruit), medicine, fodder (leaves, fruit), bee forage, **soil conservation**, shade, windbreak, live fence, boundary marker, fibres, spice (young roots), oil (seeds), water purification (seeds).

Description: A deciduous tree to 10 m, usually smaller, **pale feathery foliage**. **BARK:** Grey, thick and corky, peeling in patches. **LEAVES:** Pale green, **thrice compound**, the whole leaf **30-60 cm**, leaflets **usually oval, tip rounded 1-2 cm long**. **FLOWERS:** **Cream**, fading yellow, in long sprays, each flower with 5 petals, one erect and 4 bent back, sweet-scented, attracting insects. **FRUIT:** Long capsules, to 45 cm, **bluntly triangular in section**, splitting when dry to release **9 dark brown 3-winged seeds** from the pith.

Propagation: Direct sowing, cuttings, seedlings.

Seed: Germination rate 60-70%. No. of seeds per kg: 4,000-5,000.

treatment:

storage:

Management: Fast growing; pollarding, coppicing, lopping.

Remarks: A tree which is easily propagated and recommended for homesteads for its food value. The "Ben oil" from the seeds keeps its quality and so can lubricate precision machinery like watches. It is also used for salad oil, soap and cosmetics. The ground-up seeds have been used successfully in the Sudan, Burundi and Kenya to clear muddy water—a very valuable property. The sharp-tasting roots are a seasoning—"horseradish", and young fruit, known as "drumsticks", are a favourite vegetable in India.

