

Moringa oleifera

Moringaceae

India, Himalayas

English: Ben-oil tree, cabbage tree, horse-raddish tree, drum stick, mother's best friend.

Nyanja: Molinga

Senga: Molinga

Tumbuka: Molinga

Ecology: A tree native of India and the Western Himalayas but now widely grown throughout the tropics, 0–1,600 m. Naturalized in certain parts of Zambia such as Southern Province. In Eastern Province the tree has been planted around houses by people of Asian origin. Grows well on well-drained soils.

Uses: Food (young pods, young leaves, flowers) fodder (leaves, young fruit), bee forage, soil conservation, **water purification** (seeds), **ornamental**, live fence.

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, 1 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: Seedlings. Direct seed sowing, cuttings.

Seed: No. of seeds per kg: 4,000–9,000.

treatment: Not necessary.

storage: Can be stored for a year if kept dry.

Management: Pollarding, coppicing, lopping.

Remarks: An easy tree to propagate. 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 in India. The ground-up seeds have been used successfully in Kenya, Burundi and Sudan to clear muddy water—a very valuable property. In Eastern Province, people of Asian origin eat the leaves, young pods and flowers. The people of Southern Province have also started to eat them.

