

Morus alba

Moraceae

China

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Mulberry; **Kamba:** Kitae, Ndae (fruit); **Kikuyu:** Mutare; **Luo:** Onunga; **Swahili:** Mforsadi.

DESCRIPTION: A small exotic tree now widely planted in homesteads, rounded in shape. **LEAVES:** Very variable in shape even on one branch; oval to 3-lobed or heart-shaped, 5–15 cm long, 3 veins from the base, edge roughly toothed, tip pointed, on stalks to 5 cm, **upper leaf surface smooth**, but some hairs on veins below at least. **FLOWERS:** Sexes separate, small and **greenish**, in **drooping spikes**. **FRUIT:** Compound, about 2 cm long, **white-pink** or red, sweet and juicy but rather tasteless.

ECOLOGY: A tree native to warm temperate Asia, probably of mountainous China where it can reach more than 20 m. Now widely cultivated in Africa where it is much smaller, sometimes naturalized. It tolerates drought and heat once established. Common as a back-yard bush for fruit and shade up to 2,000 m. Agroclimatic Zones II–V. Flowers during the rainy season in most areas.

USES: Firewood, edible fruit, vegetable, fodder (leaves), bee forage, shade, ornamental, soil conservation, windbreak, live fence, feeding silkworms (leaves).

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, cuttings. Cuttings are the best method of propagation.

SEED: Poor germination; 325,000–700,000 seed per kg.

treatment: Soak in cold water for 48 hours.

storage: Can be stored for long periods.

MANAGEMENT: Fast growing, especially when grown from cuttings; pruning, pollarding and trimming of fence or of crown to keep the height and shape as required. Fruits fall quite easily as birds feed on them.

REMARKS: The ripe red fruits are a favourite with children, and a number of animals and birds, which are the main dispersal agents. Trees grown from cuttings will produce fruit within 3 years as opposed to trees grown from seed, which take 5–8 years. The species is wind pollinated. It can grow in relatively dry areas. Another species, *Morus nigra*, is similar to *M. alba* and produces purple-black berries. Can grow in slightly cooler climates than *M. alba*. Both species are grown as ornamentals and for their juicy fruit. They are excellent shade trees. The genus *Morus* has about a dozen species found from the tropics to the temperate lands of both Old and New Worlds.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Dharani, 2002; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Jensen, 1999; Katende et al., 1995; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002.

