

**Myrianthus holstii**

Cecropiaceae

**Indigenous**

**COMMON NAMES:** **English:** Giant yellow mulberry; **Kikuyu:** Mutuya; **Kipsigis:** Saounet; **Meru:** Mutuja.

**DESCRIPTION:** A medium-sized tree to 20 m with a short trunk and large branches, often with stilt roots to 60 cm. **BARK:** Grey-brown, much watery sap inside that turns black when exposed to the air. **LEAVES:** Distinctive, very large, 25–60 cm across and compound palmate with 5–7 leaflets, the largest central leaflets 20–30 cm long, outer leaflets smaller, **edge saw-toothed**, upper leaf smooth dark green, **lower side grey-green, hairy**, with conspicuous veins, on a brown hairy stalk 7–35 cm long. **FLOWERS:** Sexes separate: male flowers on thick branched heads 4–15 cm across, 6 cm long, densely covered with **tiny green flowers with orange anthers**; female flowers 20–40 on a stalked head, **yellow, 2 cm diameter**. **FRUIT:** Round and yellow, 4 cm across, with **hard sections, each conical and pointed** (resembling a small pineapple). Each seed in a section surrounded by acid edible pulp.

**ECOLOGY:** Distributed from Nigeria and Cameroon through the Congo basin to eastern Africa and south to Malawi, northern Zambia, eastern Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Found only in central Kenya, e.g. around Mt Kenya, Nyambene Hills, and in the Aberdares in highland forests, especially on forest edges and near watercourses, 900–2,400 m. Requires more than 1,000 mm rainfall. Agroclimatic Zones I–II.

**USES:** Firewood, utensils (cups), edible fruit, fodder (leaves), shade, mulch, soil conservation.

**PROPAGATION:** Seedlings. Produces root suckers.

**SEED:** Seeds should be extracted from ripe fruit, cleaned and sown fresh.

**storage:** Use fresh seed.

**MANAGEMENT:** Coppicing.

**REMARKS:** At one time (1930s) sold in some local markets in Central Province, but now the tree has become rare. Large leaves rot below the tree. The wood is light and therefore does not find much use in the household. *M. arboreus* is a related species, usually with bigger fruit. It is found in Uganda and Tanzania westwards to West Africa. The genus *Myrianthus*, with fewer than 10 species, is tropical African. It was formerly placed in the family Moraceae but has now been moved to Cecropiaceae, a family with members allied to both Urticaceae (stinging nettles) and Moraceae.

**FURTHER READING:** Beentje, 1994; Dharani, 2002; Katende et al., 1995, 1999; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002.



Fruit

