

Indigenous

Common names: **Luganda:** Kibo **Runyankore:** Mbuhivu **Runyoro:** Muswale **Rutoro:** Kiswali.

Ecology: A palm tree which grows in East Africa and throughout southern tropical Africa. It is widespread in riverine forest and freshwater swamp forest and is frequently cultivated. In Uganda it grows in low-lying wet places and along river banks, especially in the wetter forests of the Lake Victoria belt.

Uses: Fibres (from leaves for ropes and baskets), furniture (leaf stalks), decoration (seed), thatch (leaves).

Description: A massive palm growing in clusters in swamp forest, reaching 25 m but usually much less; the trunk 60 cm or more across and to 10 m high, covered with large leaf bases, old rotting ones, plant debris and epiphytes. **LEAVES:** pinnate and erect, only slightly spreading to 8 m long, usually less, the base sheathing the stem. The **leaf stalk very strong, orange-brown to crimson** when young, cylindrical to **1.5 m long and 20 cm diameter** at the base, narrowing to 12 cm across where leaflets arise. **150 or more leaflets grow in 2 planes**, each to 1 m long, 8 cm wide, edged with little spines, hardly drooping or rather stiff. Leaflets ^A in cross-section (reduplicate). **FLOWERS:** male and female flowers on the same plant grow in **massive hanging heads from the stem apex, to 3 m x 35 cm**. After flowering the plant dies, often the majority in an area dying in the same year. **FRUIT: shiny orange-brown and ovoid** (like a cone), **about 10 cm long by 5 cm across**, with 12-13 rows of tightly packed convex scales. Inside is an oily layer and one seed about 5 cm long, shaped as the fruit.

Propagation: Seedlings (sow seeds in pots) and wildings.

Seed: The large seeds can be collected under old trees, not necessary.

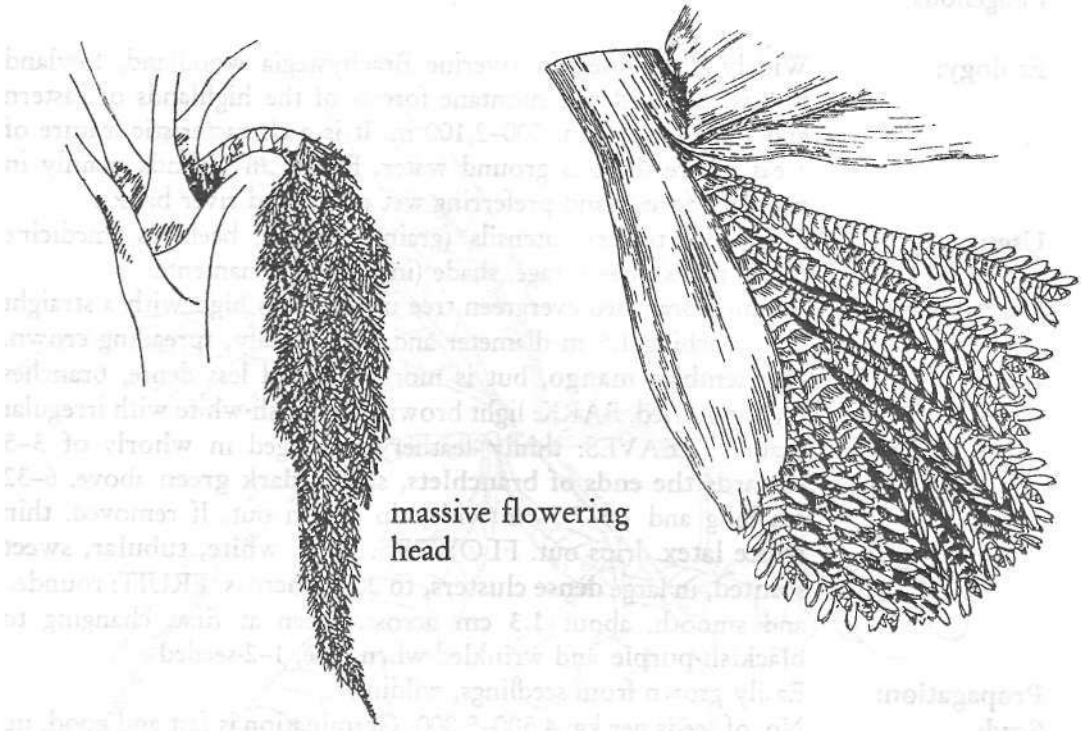
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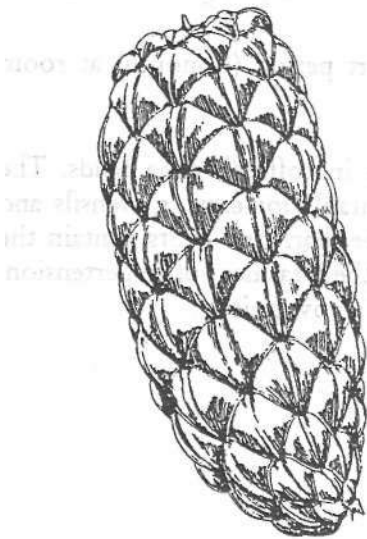
can be stored for two years. The inside of the seed is very hard.

Management: Need to control its use to prevent over-exploitation.

Remarks: Raphia plants have some of the biggest leaves in the plant kingdom. This species is quickly disappearing as its habitat is being destroyed. The outer skin of young leaflets is stripped off and makes excellent fibres for ropes and baskets—the raphia of commerce. The strong midrib is used locally for rafters, chairs, ladders, etc. The palm can be grown as individual plants or in a plantation. It can also grow on raised ground provided there is good moisture in the soil.



massive flowering head



fruit

