

Sclerocarya caffra (*S. birrea*)

Anacardiaceae

Indigenous

English: Marula
Kunda: Msewe
Nyanja: Mgamu, msewe
Senga: Msebe
Tumbuka: Msebe

Ecology: A fruit tree occurring from Ethiopia southwards to northern South Africa. Widespread at medium to low altitudes; scattered in most types of woodland. Although absent from parts of northern Zambia, it is found elsewhere, most frequent in munga woodland and chipya, on poor soils. In Eastern Province it is common in the Luangwa Valley.

Uses: Timber (general purpose), **food** (fruit, drink, jam), **medicine** (bark, roots, leaves), oil (seeds), fodder (leaves, fruit), bee forage.

Description: A deciduous tree about 10 m with a thick bole and wide branches forming a light rounded crown. **BARK:** grey becoming black, with irregular cracks and raised scales. Inner bark pink-red. **LEAVES:** **compound, crowded at branch tips**, shed April–May; new leaf growth October–December. **Leaflets in 7–13 pairs plus a central leaflet, each stalked**, oval to 10 cm long, tip pointed, darker above. **FLOWERS:** male and female flowers on the same tree or different trees. The flower spikes hang down and attract insects. **Female flowers are small, green-pink.** September–November. **FRUIT:** mature March–June; rounded and fleshy, skin cream but spotted, to 3.5 cm across; the skin peels away from the thin sweet flesh surrounding a large stone, tasting a bit like mango; 2–3 seeds inside the stone are oily and edible.

Propagation: Cuttings, seedlings.

Seed: No. of seeds per kg: 400–450. Germination rate 40% after 6 weeks.

treatment: Soak in cold water for 24 hours.

storage: Use fresh seed.

Management: Coppicing, pruning.

Remarks: The fruits are well liked by children and rich in vitamin C. ICRAF, in collaboration with national researchers is looking into possibilities for domestication. The fruits are eaten by a wide variety of game including elephants.

