

Sterculia africana**Sterculiaceae****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Boni:** Darab; **Digo:** Mgoza; **English:** African star chestnut, African sterculia; **Gabra:** K'arrari; **Giriama:** Muoria; **Kamba:** Muusya, Kisya, Kyusya; **Maasai:** Olkharasha; **Malakote:** Qararhi; **Orma:** Kharrari, Kharandri; **Sanya:** K'arari; **Somali:** Danrab, Qharanri; **Swahili:** Mgoza, Ngozo; **Taita:** Moja; **Turkana:** Etete.

DESCRIPTION: A deciduous tree with a thick, fluted trunk, usually 5–12 m but may reach 25 m, the erect branches spreading to a rounded crown. Branches soft and brittle. **BARK:** Smooth, often shiny white, later flaking irregularly into patches to reveal a beautiful purple–green–white–brown underbark. **LEAVES:** Crowded at the tips of branches, deeply divided with 3–5 lobes, over 10 cm across, on a stalk to 10 cm, lobes pointed. **FLOWERS:** Appear on the bare tree, sexes separate on the same tree, in branched heads to 9 cm, green-yellow sepals (no petals) joined together, 2.5 cm across with red lines within. **FRUIT:** 1–5 woody beaked sections, boat-shaped, with short yellow hairs. One side only breaks open to free 3–10 flat, blue-grey seeds that hang like ticks around the open edge.

ECOLOGY: An indigenous tree occurring from Kenya to South Africa. It is commonly found at low altitudes in hot dry areas, on rocky hills or the fringes of woodlands. The bare-branched tree with pale bark stands out. Scattered in occurrence, usually below 600 m, but found up to 1,000 m. Closely associated with *Acacia-Commiphora* bushland. Agroclimatic Zones V–VI.

USES: Timber, furniture, bee forage, ornamental, fibre (bark), mats, gum.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, cuttings, truncheons (large woody cuttings).

SEED: 15,000–17,000 seeds per kg. Germination is good and fast, completed after 20 days.

treatment: Not necessary.

storage: Remain viable only for about 2 months at room temperature.

MANAGEMENT: Pruning, coppicing.

REMARKS: The hairs on the fruit irritate the skin. The soft, light wood is used only to make local furniture items. The bark rope can be used to tie thatching materials and poles in house construction.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Dharani, 2002; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999 (*S. stenocarpa*); Mbuya et al., 1994; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979; van Wyk, 1993.

