

Sterculia africana

Sterculiaceae

Indigenous

English: Tick tree, African star-chestnut

Kunda: Mulele

Nyanja: Mgoza, Mlele

Senga: Mgozga

Tumbuka: Mgozga

Ecology: A tree of lower altitudes, north to Kenya and south to South Africa. It occurs in the southern half of Zambia from Sesheke to Lundazi. In Eastern Province, it is scattered in valleys and on rocky hillsides, often on the fringes of mopane woodland. The bare-branched tree with pale bark stands out; often found in hot dry areas—common below 600 m.

Uses: Timber (furniture), bee forage, **rope** (bark).

Description: A deciduous tree, 10–15 m tall, with thick, fluted trunk, the erect branches spreading to a rounded crown. **BARK:** smooth, often shiny white, later flaking irregularly into patches to reveal purple-green-white-brown underbark. **LEAVES:** crowded at ends of branches, deeply **divided, 3–5 lobes**, over 10 cm across, on **stalk to 10 cm**, the lobes pointed. **FLOWERS:** appear on the bare tree, in branched heads to 9 cm, male and female flowers separate; green-yellow sepals (no petals) to 2.5 cm across with red honey-guide lines within; September–November. **FRUIT:** **1–5 woody beaked sections**, “boat-shaped”, with short yellow hairs. One side only breaks open to free 3–10 fat, **blue-grey seeds which hang looking like ticks around the open edge**; April–July. In between the seeds are irritating hairs.

Propagation: Seedlings, cuttings.

Seed: No. of seeds per kg: 15,000–17,000. Germination good and fast. Complete germination after 20 days.

treatment: Not necessary.

storage: Can retain viability for about 2 months.

Management: Coppicing, pruning.

Remarks: The light wood is soft and can only be used for cheap furniture. The bark rope is used to tie thatch grass and poles in house construction. It is also used to make mats.

