

# Swartzia madagascariensis

# Caesalpinioideae

Indigenous

- Common names: Eng: snake bean tree; Fipa: kikonda; **Mate:** chigenge; Nyam: kasanda, nyegenye.
- Ecology: A tree found in Cameroon, Zaire, Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa. It is widespread in Tanzania from Mwanza southwards to Ruvuma growing in Brachystegia woodland and wooded grassland, 450-1,280 m.
- Uses: Firewood, charcoal, poles, posts, utensils (pestles), carving, bee forage, medicine (bark, leaves, roots), fish poison (pods).
- Description: A small deciduous tree 3-4 m, sometimes up to 15 m, the trunk and branches often twisted, the crown dense and rounded. **BARK:** very rough and thick, longitudinally fissured or cracked. **LEAVES:** compound, grey-green, with **7-11 leaflets alternate along the stalk plus one** leaflet at the tip, each one leathery to 7 cm, tip rounded pr notched, yellow hairs below. **FLOWERS:** in sprays of 2-10, **fragrant, orange-yellow**, each flower with **one large erect petal**. **FRUIT:** the heavy pods hang on the bare tree, **cylindrical, dark brown, to 30 cm**, the "snake bean" straight or curved. On the ground 10-15 seeds will be set free from the sticky yellow tissue when the pods rot.
- Propagation: Seedlings.
- Seed info.: No. of seeds per kg: 2,500. Germination is good and fairly fast: up to 70% after 20 days.
- treatment: immerse in hot water (75-80°C), allow to cool, and soak for 24 hours.
- storage: can retain viability for a long period (up to 2 years) at room temperature if kept dry and insect free.
- Management: Pruning, coppicing.
- Remarks: It is favoured for fence posts as the wood is termite resistant. The pods contain saponin and if fed to cows will flavour the milk. Crushed pods have been used in storage bins to protect grain from weevils. The wood is even and close grained and the red-brown heartwood may turn purple-black so it is highly favoured by wood carvers when *Dalbergia melanoxylon* is not available. Medicine against malaria and venereal disease is made from the roots.

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