

Synsepalum brevipes* (*Pachystela brevipes*)*Sapotaceae****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Digo:** Mtsamvia, Msami; **Kikuyu:** Kinoa, Munoa; **Luo:** Kang'o; **Swahili:** Msamvia.

DESCRIPTION: A much-branched tree to 25 m, the bole often like a pillar, **deeply ridged and usually buttressed** at the base with a dense crown. Young shoots and leaf stalks with dense hairs. **BARK:** Grey, rough, flaking into rectangular scales, exuding white latex. **LEAVES:** Alternate, long, oval, **wider at the tip, 9–20 cm long**, young leaves grey, hairy, narrowed to a 1-cm stalk. **A pair of 1-cm long hair-like stipules** persist at the base of the leaf stalk. **FLOWERS:** Small and fragrant, **yellow–cream–green, in dense clusters** below leaves. **FRUIT:** **Yellow–orange, long oval with a pointed tip and thick skin, 2.5 cm**, containing milky juice and white acid-sweet edible pulp. **The one seed is shiny brown with a large scar on one side.**

ECOLOGY: A tree widespread in tropical Africa from Guinea to Sudan and south to Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique. Typical of lowland rainforest where there is a high permanent water table, in riverine forest or margins of lakes. In Kenya, it is found in riverine forests, moist forests or forest remnants, and in groundwater forests both at the coast and inland, and in forests on the shores of Lake Victoria, up to 1,500 m. Common at the south coast. Agroclimatic Zones II–III.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, timber (construction), poles, utensils, edible fruit, shade, mulch.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings.

SEED: The ripe berries should be crushed and the seeds separated.

treatment: Soak in cold water for 12 hours before sowing. Water sparingly before germination to avoid the seed rotting.

storage: Store dried seed in sealed containers in a cool place.

MANAGEMENT: Coppicing, pollarding.

REMARKS: A tree that can be planted as single trees for fruit, as an avenue or for shade. The red-yellow heartwood is hard and durable and has been used to make pestles and mortars. The fruit pulp is edible and liked, especially by children. Common on Ssesse Islands in the Ugandan part of Lake Victoria.

A related species, *S. msolo* (*Pachystela msolo*) (**Digo:** Mtsamvia; **Pokomo:** Mtsamvia; **Swahili:** Msamvia), is a medium-sized tree to 20 m or more found in riverine forests of the lower Tana River and in wet forests of Kwale District below 100 m. It is also found from West Africa east to eastern Africa. The trunk is deeply ridged and the base buttressed. Leaves are widest towards the tip, large, to 35 cm, and the lower surface may be slightly hairy. Flowers are small, greenish white, fragrant, in clusters on old wood. Flower stalks of this species are generally more than 4 mm (compared with those of *S. brevipes*, which are less than 2 mm long). Fruit is almost round, to 2.5 cm in diameter, dull yellow when ripe, skin

thin, containing juicy flesh and single seed to 1.8 cm with an aril-like scar. The fruits are edible and are sweet. The wood is a source of firewood, charcoal and building poles. It is also a shade tree.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Katende et al., 1999; Maundu et al., 1999; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990.

