

Tree Species No. TTS1

Adansonia digitata, Family Bombacaceae

Adansonia digitata is a huge tropical tree with a swollen trunk and a fairly thin canopy. For about six months during the dry season it sheds its leaves hence it is often referred to as Africa's upside down tree because its branch system resembles roots. This provides an important fodder source during the dry season when vegetation is sparse.

Synonyms: *Adansonia baobab*, *A. situla*, *A. somalensis*.

Common names: Baobab, tebeldi, mbuyu, mwanba, muramba, olmisera, muru, lemonade tree, monkeybread tree.

Distribution: It can be found throughout semi-arid and sub-humid Africa. It is common in savannah regions of Africa, where it is often found near villages and is grown for its medicinal properties.

Ecology

Rainfall: 250-1500mm with a marked dry season of 4-10 months occurring in one or two periods.

Temperature: 19-35° C.

Altitude: 0-1500m.

Soil type: Tolerates most soil types but prefers well drained, acidic soils.



Botany

Height: Usually up to 20m, but heights of 25-30m have been recorded.

Diameter at breast height: The trunk has a diameter of 2-6m with a girth that is often more than 20m.

Crown: Spreading. Resembles large roots when the leaves are shed.

Flowers: Flowers during the spring and summer producing large white leathery petals. They are approximately 15-20cm long on a 25cm long peduncle. The flowers are commonly pollinated by bats.

Fruit: The fruit appear during Autumn and winter and each fruit contains around 100 seeds of approximately 1cm³. They vary in shape from long and slender to round or oval. The fruit are between 12-40cm long and have a diameter of between 7-17cm. The husk is covered by brownish green matted hair that has a velvet texture.

Uses

Main: It is commonly used for water storage. The top of the trunk is hollowed out so rain water and dew can collect. This is an important source of water to travellers during the dry season. The leaves are edible and when young they can be dried and crushed, and used as a thickening ingredient.

The leaves are shed during the dry season and provide an important fodder source when other vegetation is limited. The leaves can be lopped at the start of the rainy season to provide animal forage.

The bark from young trees can produce a resistant fibre from which cords, fishing nets and baskets can be made. The bark regenerates well and can be re-stripped several years later.

Others: The roots can be used to produce a red dye, the ashes for fertilisers and soap production and it is used locally as a medicinal plant.

Cultural instructions

Seeds: There are approximately 2000-3000 seeds per kg that can retain viability for several years if stored in a clean, dry, sealed container to protect from water, pests and diseases.

Pre-treatment: There are several methods that can be used, the seeds can be placed in boiling water, removed immediately and allowed to cool to outdoor temperatures or, dormancy can be broken by allowing the seeds to pass through the digestive system of animals or, place in boiling water and allow to soak for 24 hours or, nick the seed coat.

Germination: The germination period is very variable, ranging from 3-6 months. Seed germination can be very poor.

Nursery: Seedlings are very fragile during early stages of growth and therefore need protection especially from animal trampling.

Management: Early growth can be rapid therefore lopping may be necessary. The Baobab coppices well.

Other

Pests and diseases: No serious pests or diseases have been identified.

Limitations: Seedlings are very fragile and so are very susceptible to animal trampling. Hosts a number crop pests especially those of cotton, including *Dysdercus* spp. Poor germination rates.

