



Global  
Facilitation  
Unit  
for Underutilized  
Species

# MASAU

*(Ziziphus mauritiana)*

enabling deployment of underutilized species



**What is Masau** and where does it come from?

**Masau is a wild fruit that grows in abundance in the Zambezi Valley in Northern and Eastern Zimbabwe. The masau originates in India and arrived in Zimbabwe via Arab traders plying the coastal routes of neighbouring Mozambique. After centuries of localisation to African conditions, the masau fruit has acquired considerably different characteristics from the fruits found in India – it tends to be more tart and refreshing (the Indian fruit is closest to a date in sweetness). The fruits are approximately 1 to 3 centimeters in diameter and when ripe are yellowish to deep mahogany brown colour.**

*The fruit is not only important to household economies in the Zambezi Valley but also to their livestock and wild animals that roam there. Elephant are particularly fond of the fruit and leaves of the masau tree spending significant time in the masau groves during the fruiting season.*

## PROPERTIES

---

Masau fruit is nutritiously rich and delicious in flavor. It is higher in vitamin C content than apples or citrus fruit; it is also high in beta carotene.

### ❖ Food and Beverages

Whilst the masau is eaten fresh, it can also be dried for use throughout the year or made into bread. Masau jam, which has a shelf life of two years from the date of manufacture, is free of pesticides and chemical additives. The fruit is also used as the base for distilling a local alcoholic beverage – *kachasu*.

### ❖ Health

In traditional medicine masau is used to treat a variety of ailments including: colds and flu (*fruit*), malnutrition related diseases in children (*fruit*), convulsions in children (*roots*), indigestion (*roots*).

## GROWING

---

Approximately 500,000 people live in the arid and semi-arid Zambezi Valley where the masau is found. This territory suffers from low rainfall and recurring drought, which means low yields or failure of traditional crops such as maize, whilst the masau fruit flourishes in such conditions. The trees are also semi-domesticated, occurring both in wild conditions, arable fields and at homesteads. Some areas of the Valley have strict management rules regarding masau, which protects them from being harvested by outside collectors.

## HARVESTING

---

The masau trees produce fruit during the Zimbabwean winter, from June to September.







## **Contribution to rural and social development**

The masau is an important source of food and a vital source of cash income for poor households. The fruit is usually purchased by middlemen, transporters and retailers from Harare and other large towns for resale at markets. The pickers are often forced to barter the fruit for second hand clothes and other goods. The pickers are also paid in cash but at very low prices compared with what the purchasers are able to get for the fruit at the markets. Recognising the potential for commercialisation of the masau fruit, a local Non-Governmental Organisation, Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE) and a Zimbabwean specialty food company, Tulimara, are working together to market and promote commercially viable masau products. SAFIRE works with the Zambezi Valley communities to train farmers in sustainable harvesting and grading of the fruit. Tulimara buys the fruit directly from the farmers at fairly negotiated prices and manufacturers it into jam.

**The exhibits on show** are just few of many commercial products made from Masau:

Masau jam

SOME PRODUCERS / RETAILERS / DISTRIBUTORS

❖❖❖ Speciality Foods of Africa Pvt Ltd - [www.tulimara.co.zw](http://www.tulimara.co.zw)



Global  
Facilitation  
Unit  
for Underutilized  
Species

*For further information, contact:*

**GFU for Underutilized Species**

Via dei Tre Denari, 472/a  
00057 Maccarese, Rome, Italy

TEL: +39-06-6118-292/302

e-mail: [underutilized-species@cgiar.org](mailto:underutilized-species@cgiar.org)

website: [www.underutilized-species.org](http://www.underutilized-species.org)