

LOCAL NAMES

Afrikaans (springsaadboom); English (jumping seed tree); Luganda (musasa, musanvuma); Tigrigna (berberi-islamay); Xhosa (umHongolo); Zulu (umHlepa, umDlampunzi)

BOTANIC DESCRIPTION

Sapium ellipticum is a small to medium-sized, deciduous or semi-deciduous tree up to 12 m in height, occasionally reaching 20-25 m (max. 35). Bark light brown to very dark (almost black) and rough; branchlets are smooth and tend to droop. The young parts exude white latex when cut.

Leaves elliptic to oblong lanceolate, simple, 6-15 x 2.5-4 cm, dark green, glossy, alternate; apex tapering, often attenuate; base tapering to almost rounded; margin irregularly toothed to scalloped, 1-2 glands at each side of the base, borne on short stalks; midrib and veins raised below with about 10 pairs of side veins; petiole up to 10 mm long.

Flowers yellow, 5-10 cm long, in axillary or terminal catkinlike spikes at the ends of branchlets; no petals or sepals; numerous male flowers above with yellow stamens; 1-5 rounded female flowers at the base, larger, on longer stalks than males.

Fruit a 1-2 lobed capsule about 10 x 7 mm, reddish, leathery, usually crowned with the remnants of the persistent styles, without horns, dehiscent, containing round, pale brown seeds.

The specific name 'ellipticum' refers to the shape of the leaves, which are often elliptic.

BIOLOGY

In southern Africa, flowering occurs from November to April and fruiting from March to August. *S. ellipticum* is monoecious, flowers are unisexual.

ECOLOGY

S. ellipticum is common on the outskirts of evergreen forest and in wooded ravines. It is a tree of the afro-montane rainforest and undifferentiated afro-montane forest (mixed podocarpus forest), often in clearings, riverine forest also in secondary montane evergreen bushland and closed lowland forest. In Zululand, it occurs as a canopy tree in swamp forest. Its occurrence ranges from Transkei through Natal and Zululand to the Transvaal lowveld, to eastern Africa and tropical Africa, in coastal forests, on forest margins and on stream banks. Trees are light demanding. They have become rare in some places because of incursions into their habitat.

BIOPHYSICAL LIMITS

Altitude: 1 000-2 450 m, Mean annual rainfall: (min. 1 000) 1 200-2 000 mm

DOCUMENTED SPECIES DISTRIBUTION

Native: Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Portugal, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Exotic:



The map above shows countries where the species has been planted. It does neither suggest that the species can be planted in every ecological zone within that country, nor that the species can not be planted in other countries than those depicted. Since some tree species are invasive, you need to follow biosafety procedures that apply to your planting site.

PRODUCTS

Fuel: *S. ellipticum* is a source of firewood and is used to produce charcoal.

Timber: The wood is soft, pale coloured, light in weight and tough, but not durable; it is used for tool handles and farm implements.

Medicine: Leaves and roots are used to treat mumps.

SERVICES

Ornamental: The attractive trees are suitable for planting in amenity areas.

TREE MANAGEMENT

Trees respond well to coppicing and pollarding.

PESTS AND DISEASES

Insect larvae that frequently infest the seeds straighten their bodies convulsively, causing the seeds to jump several centimetres into the air. Wood is liable to borer attack.

FURTHER READNG

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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