

## **Sarcocephalus latifolius**

opepe

(J.E. Smith) E.A. Bruce

Rubiaceae

### LOCAL NAMES

English (Sierra Leone peach, pin cushion tree, Guinea peach, African peach); French (liane à fraises); Igbo (ubuluinu); Trade name (opepe)

### BOTANIC DESCRIPTION

*Sarcocephalus latifolius* is a multi-stemmed tree or shrub up to 12 m. It has an open canopy.

Flowers with terminal spherical head-like cymes of small whitish flowers. In *Nauclea*, the flowers are joined by their calyces.

The fruit is a syncarp.

The tribe Naucleae to which *S. latifolius* belongs shows similarities to the family Combretaceae. Some authors have separated the tribe into a new family Naucleaceae.

The generic name is derived from the Greek words sarco (fleshy) and cephalus (headed) in reference to the flowers. The specific epithet is derived from the Latin words lati (broad) and folius (leaved).

### BIOLOGY

A hermaphroditic tree flowering from April-June. Fruits ripen from July-September. The grey baboon (*Papio anubis*) disperses its seeds.



*Sarcocephalus latifolius* foliage (Joris de Wolf, Patrick Van Damme, Diego Van Meersschaut)



*Sarcocephalus latifolius* foliage (Joris de Wolf, Patrick Van Damme, Diego Van Meersschaut)



*Sarcocephalus latifolius* slash (Joris de Wolf, Patrick Van Damme, Diego Van Meersschaut)

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### ECOLOGY

*S. latifolius* is a savanna shrub sometimes found in undisturbed fringing forest and closed savanna woodland. Three other closely related species, *N. pobeguinii*, *N. diderichii* and *N. vanderguchtii* are forest trees.

### BIOPHYSICAL LIMITS

Altitude: 0-200 m

Mean annual temperature: 27 deg C

Mean annual rainfall: 2700 mm

### DOCUMENTED SPECIES DISTRIBUTION

Native: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria

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**

Food: The fleshy fruits of *S. latifolius* are edible.

Fodder: Livestock eat shoot and leaves of the African peach.

Apiculture: The flowers provide nectar and pollen to bees.

Fuel: Opepe wood is a source of firewood.

Timber: Opepe wood is termite resistant.

Tannin or dyestuff: Opepe bark yields tannins used in dyeing.

Medicine: The fruit is eaten as a cough remedy. In Kinshasa, *S. latifolius* is used by traditional healers to treat diabetes. In Nigeria *N. latifolia*, is used as a cure for malaria fevers. The aqueous extracts of *N. latifolia* leaves (0.25-2.0 mg/ml) paralysed *T. columbriformis* larvae in a concentration-dependent manner (ED50 value of 0.52 mg/ml at 24 h). The paralysing effects of the extracts increased with period of exposure. Extracts of the plant exhibited activity against *Escherichia coli*, *Shigella flexneri*, *Salmonella typhi* and *Staphylococcus aureus* (responsible for gastroenteritis in children). Ethanolic extracts of *N. latifolia* decreased the level of parasitaemia in a dose-dependent manner in mice experimentally infected with *Trypanosoma brucei brucei*.

**Other products:**

The alkaloid strictosamine is obtained from the roots, leaves and stem bark.

**SERVICES**

Erosion control: *S. latifolius* is a suitable species for conservation and soil stabilization.

Shade or shelter: Offers shade and acts as a windbreak.

Soil improver: The leaves are used as mulch.

Boundary or barrier or support: The tree is used as a live stake in farms.

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### **TREE MANAGEMENT**

The tree's form factor can be checked by coppicing. The tree is light demanding and should not be planted in extreme shade conditions.

**FURTHER READING**

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Lieberman D et al. 1979. Seed dispersal by baboons in the Shai Hills, Ghana. *Ecology*. 60(1): 65-75.

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Steentoft M. 1988. Flowering plants in West Africa. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

**SUGGESTED CITATION**

Orwa C, A Mutua, Kindt R, Jamnadass R, S Anthony. 2009 *Agroforestry Database: a tree reference and selection guide version 4.0* (<http://www.worldagroforestry.org/sites/treedbs/treedatabases.asp>)