

Adansonia digitata**Bombacaceae****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Bajun:** Muuyu; **Boni:** Jah; **Chonyi:** Muuyu; **Digo:** Muuyu; **Embu:** Musemba; **English:** Baobab; **Giriama:** Muuyu, Mauyu (fruit); **Kamba:** Muamba, Mwaamba, Namba (fruit); **Maasai:** Olmesera; **Malakote:** Mubuyu; **Mbeere:** Muramba; **Meru:** Muiramba, Muramba; **Orma:** Yak; **Samburu:** Lamai; **Sanya:** Yak; **Somali:** Yak, Yaaq; **Swahili:** Mbuyu, Muuyu; **Taita:** Mlamba; **Tharaka:** Muguma kirindi, Muramba.

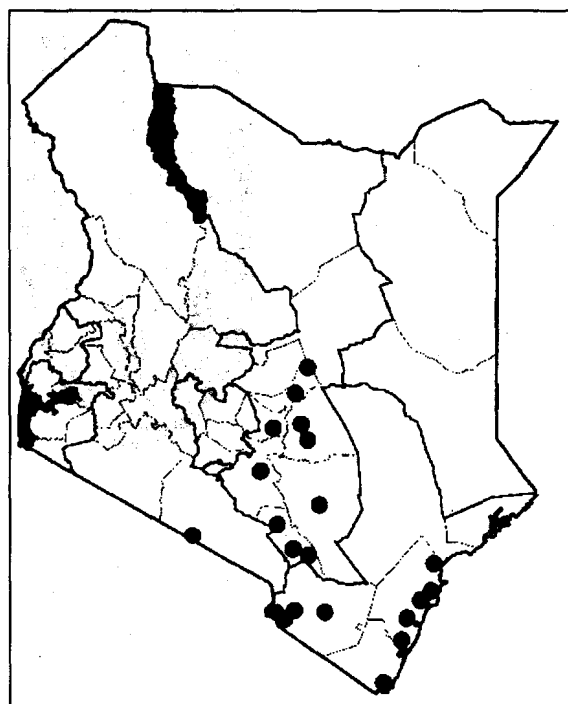
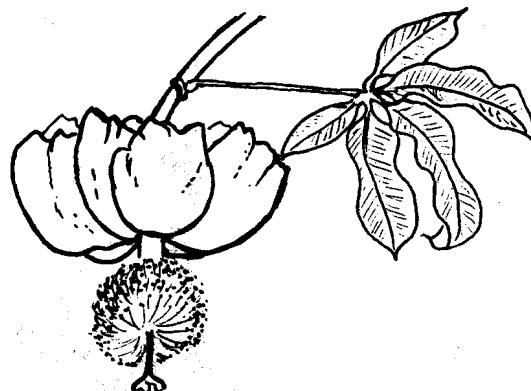
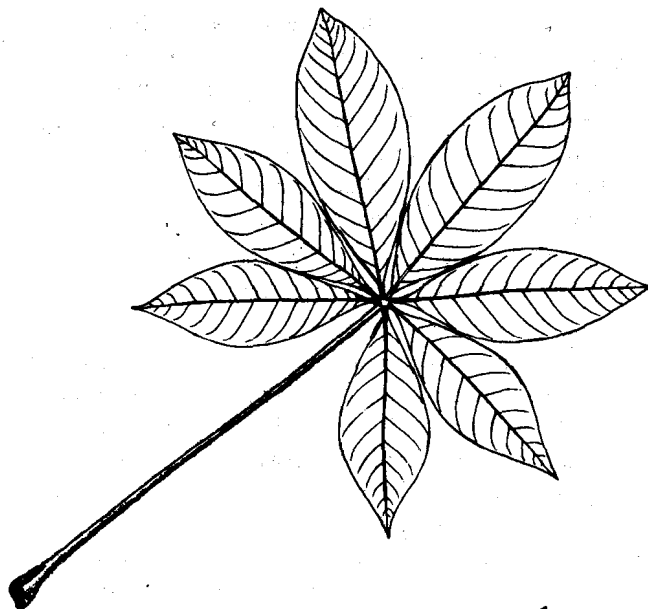
DESCRIPTION: A large deciduous tree with a hugely swollen trunk, and often branching near the ground. The trunk diameter may reach 6 m, the girth 20 m, and up to 20 m high. Bare for up to 9 months, the stiff bare branches resemble roots (upside-down tree). The trunk is sometimes hollow. **BARK:** Smooth, shiny, grey to 10 cm thick, young spongy wood can hold much water.

LEAVES: Seedlings have simple leaves, mature leaves with up to 9 leaflets, usually 5. **FLOWERS:** Large and white, opening at night, the unpleasant-smelling nectar attracts pollinating fruit bats. **FRUIT:** Very big, hairy, yellow-brown capsules, hanging on long stalks, usually on the bare tree. Many seeds embedded in white-pink, dry, edible pulp.

ECOLOGY: A well-known tree of tropical Africa, from West Africa and Somalia to southern Africa. In Kenya, a common tree in the coastal region but it also grows further inland, e.g. Taveta, Kibwezi, south-eastern Makueni, dry parts of Kitui, Meru National Park and at Torosei in Kajiado, 0–1,300 m. Also planted as an ornamental outside this range. Grows in dry low country in *Sterculia–Delonix alata–Acacia–Commiphora* bushland and in low, hot, high-humidity coastal areas. Grows in most well-drained soils, deep rooted, drought hardy, prefers a high water table. Common on red soils, sandy loam and in rocky areas. Rainfall: 300–900 mm. Agroclimatic Zones II–VI.

Uses: Edible fruit pulp (sweet–sour to taste), edible fried seed, vegetable, flavouring (fruits dissolved in water), medicine (bark, roots, fruit juice, leaves), fodder (leaves,

shoots and fruits), bee forage, ornamental, mulch, snares, fibre (ropes, baskets, fibre cloth, musical-instrument strings, waterproof hats), roofing (bark), resin, gum, dye, veterinary medicine, water storage in the trunk.



***Adansonia digitata* (cont)**

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, direct sowing at site.

SEED: Germination is fair but sporadic in up to 3 months; 1,500–2,500 seeds per kg. Germination rates 30–40%; good and well-treated seeds can germinate in 30–50 days.

treatment: Nick, or pour boiling water over seed, remove at once and cool to room temperature. Naturally the seed may take several years to germinate and be induced by fire, hence the observation that it only germinates after people abandon a current homestead (Giriama). Passing through the digestive tract of large mammals such as elephants also breaks seed dormancy.

storage: Seed can be stored for long periods.

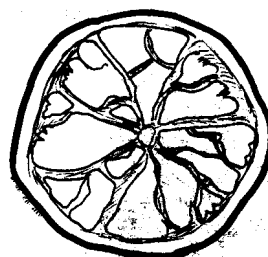
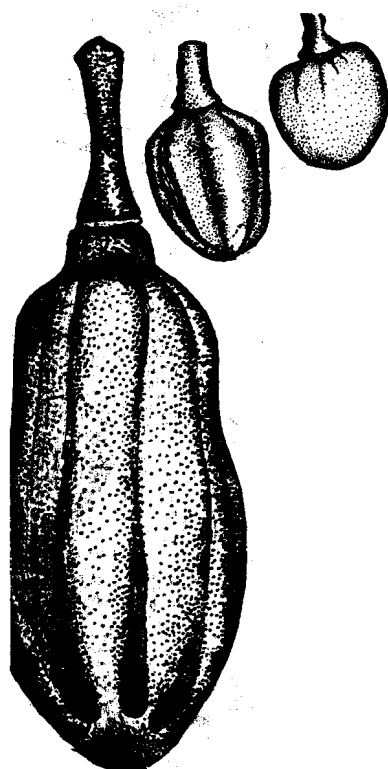
MANAGEMENT: A slow-growing tree. The tree should not be planted near houses. Lateral roots may reach out over 100 m.

REMARKS: The tree is fire resistant. Despite its soft wood, it is one of the longest-living trees in the world—to 3,000 years. The baobab tree is surrounded by myths and beliefs among most peoples in areas where it grows. Fruits and strings have a commercial value. It is said to produce its first fruits after 60 years (Kitui). The dry, cream-coloured pulp is eaten raw or is dissolved in water and used as sauce (*mboga*) or added to sour porridge. Young leaves are used as a vegetable (Giriama, Mbeere).

The pulp-coated seeds (*mabuyu*) are coloured, sugar-coated and sold as sweets in coastal towns (Swahili). Fibre from the trunk is used as a string and for weaving baskets and ropes. The tree is used for placing beehives. Appearance of new leaves or flowers signals the start of the rainy season (Kamba, Mbeere). Fallen trees improve the soil quality considerably and are a substrate for edible mushrooms. Fruit shells are used as firewood, containers, bowls and for making a variety of items, including rat traps (Giriama). The shoots and trunks are eaten by elephants. Fallen leaves are eaten by livestock. Too many baobab trees together in cropland may be a problem as they take up a large amount of space. There are 9 species in this genus, 7 of which are endemic to Madagascar. Two species are found in north-western Australia: *A. gregorii* (Australian baobab or dead rat) has a strong resemblance to the African baobab but does not usually grow as high.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Albrecht, 1993; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Blundell, 1987; Dharani, 2002; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; ITDG and IIRR, 1996; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979; van Wyk, 1998; von Maydell, 1990.

Variation in fruit



Cross-section of fruit