

Bauhinia variegata

Caesalpinaceae

India, Tropical Asia, China

Common names: **English:** Orchid tree, mountain ebony.

Ecology: A tree grown throughout the tropics. Commonly planted in gardens and avenues in most towns throughout Uganda, but particularly common in Central Region.

Uses: Firewood, tools, food (flowers as pickles), fodder, shade, ornamental, soil conservation, tannin.

Description: An attractive small semi-deciduous tree, usually to 6 m but sometimes much taller. **BARK:** grey and smooth, furrowed and flaking with age. **LEAVES:** alternate, **dull blue-green, the two lobes 10-15 cm across** (camel-foot shaped), veins radiating from the leaf base. **FLOWERS:** pink-white in short sprays, each flower with **five petals marked with rose or yellow-green, one petal different in shape and colour** (orchid like), five arched stamens. **FRUIT:** flat brown **pods to 20 cm long, twisted open** to release round flat seeds 1 cm across.

Propagation: Seedlings (sow seed in pots), direct sowing on site.

Seed: No. of seeds per kg: 4,200-5,700. Germination rate is about 70%, completed after three weeks.

treatment: not necessary for fresh seeds. Stored seeds needs soaking in cold water for 24 hours.

storage: if sun-dried and stored at room temperature, seed can retain viability for some months. Best germination is from fresh seeds.

Management: Fairly fast growing; coppicing, lopping, pollarding.

Remarks: In India and Nepal flowers of *B. variegata* are used for vegetables and pickles. The heavy, hard wood makes good tools.

