

*Borassus aethiopum*

## Palmae

Indigenous

**English:** Borassus palm  
**Kunda:** Kakoma  
**Nyanja:** Chipamba, mlaza, kakoma  
**Senga:** Mkama  
**Tumbuka:** Mkama

**Ecology:** A tropical palm tree occurring from Senegal to Sudan, south to northern South Africa, 0–1,200 m. It requires a high water-table and therefore is found in dense stands along watercourses, tolerating seasonal floods. In Zambia, it is found in most Districts and is common in the Luangwa Valley of Eastern Province and more occasional in woodlands. As elephant eat the fruit, they have contributed to its distribution.

**Uses:** Timber (construction), **poles, food** (fruit, drink), medicine (roots, oil, fruit), **basketry, mats, thatching** (leaves, leaf stalks), fish traps, brushes (leaf stalk).

**Description:** A tall palm to 25 m with a characteristic **thickening above the middle** after about 25 years' growth. **BARK:** smooth, grey-green; dead leaves remain around the young palm trunks. **LEAVES:** **large, fan-shaped to 4 m long by 3 m across**, deeply divided into narrow leaflets; thorny along the leaf stalk. **FLOWERS:** male and female trees; males producing branched spikes to 2 m, September–October. **FRUIT:** **large, round** about 15 cm, fragrant and **orange-brown**, in a large calyx "cup", with soft fibrous pulp; fruit matures a year after flowering; around 1–3 seeds.

**Propagation:** Seedlings, direct seeding.

**Seed:** No. of seeds per kg: 2–3. Seeds should be dried in the shade to avoid scorching. Germination takes one month.

**treatment:** Not necessary.

**storage:** Sow fresh after removing seed from pulp. Seeds dried in the shade remain viable for up to 6 months.

**Management:** Rotation periods range between 60 and 140 years depending on site.

**Remarks:** Young leaves used for basketry and the wood is hard, heavy and resistant to both fungi and termites. The rich sap of the flowering shoots can be tapped to make a potent palm wine. The palm grows very slowly (flowering in about 30 years), and taking about 10 years to develop the main trunk. The poles are durable and now popular for building purposes at safari camps in the South Luangwa National Park.

