

Uses and economic value

- The bark makes excellent ropes, bags, hats and floor mats.
- The bark is also used to make paper.
- The fruit pulp is used to make cool and hot beverages high in Vitamin C content.
- The pulp can be processed into sweets.
- The tender leaves are used as relish in many parts of the country and can be dried, ground and stored in large quantities. The flowers are used to flavour drinks and are also eaten raw.
- The seeds are a potential source of protein, they are pounded whole into a coarse meal and added to soups and other dishes.
- When roasted the seeds are used as a coffee substitute.
- The dried powdered roots are believed to be a remedy for malaria.
- The semi-fluid gum, obtained from baobab bark, is used to treat sores.
- The fruits are a source of income for many families in Zimbabwe. They are sold as fruits or processed to add value before they are sold.
- The seed is processed for oils used by the cosmetic industry.
- In many communities, the shell is burnt into ashes and used as a substitute for bicarbonate of soda when preparing okra the traditional way.
- The ash is also used as a remedy for toothaches



Distribution and Habitat

The Baobab tree generally occurs in low altitudes and in hot dry woodlands. In Zimbabwe the tree is widespread along the Zambezi valley in Matabeleland North, Mashonaland West, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East and Manicaland provinces. On the Southern parts of the country, it is abundant in Matabeleland South province, Masvingo province and also south of Manicaland province.

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Zimbabwe@40,
Celebrating 40 years of Tree
Planting and Sustainable
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Botanical name: *Adansonia digitata*

English name: African Baobab

Shona name: Muuyu

Ndebele name: Umkhomo

Tonga Name: Mubuyu

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TREE OF THE YEAR 2020

Background

The tree is very majestic and massive, usually more than 20 m in height at full maturity, with a trunk up to 10 m in diameter and a girth of around 20m. It is one of the outstanding indigenous deciduous trees species in Zimbabwe which can live up to over 1000 years.



Name Derivation



The species name was derived from the hand-like leaves or digitate leaves and the genus was named after French naturalist called Michael Adanson.

Description of the tree



It has thick wide spreading branches, usually short trunk of up to 10 to 15 meters. The form of the trunk varies, with young trees being conical then cylindrical bottle shaped when mature.

Branches are thick and tapering resembling a root system and for this reason

the tree is also called an up-side down tree.

The leaves are hand-sized, alternating and divided into 5-7 finger-like, oblong to ovate leaflets, with the smallest leaflet located on the lower part and the terminal leaflet being the largest. The leaves are also dark green with short hairs, looping lateral veins, apex and tapering base.

The flowers are waxy white and can grow up to 20cm in diameter, usually hanging with large crinkly and spreading petals. Sepals are cup-shaped and hairy. Stamens are many with columns dividing into voluminous filaments of one-celled anthers. The flowers usually fall off within 24 hours.



The fruit are indehiscent usually 12 cm or more, ovoid or egg shaped covered with hard woody shell, with yellowish-grey velvety hairs. The seeds are embedded in a whitish powdery pulp which contains appreciable quantities of tartaric acid and potassium bitartrate.

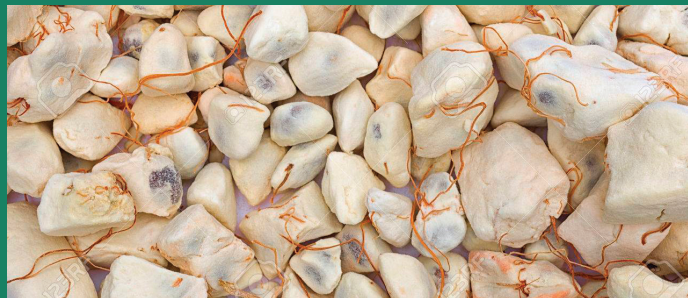


The bark is soft, smooth, reddish brown to grey in colour and with longitudinal fibres



Ecological value

- The tree is important as nesting site for several bird species.
- Where the trunk has been damaged it usually becomes hollow which is a good habitat for wild animals.
- The hollow trunk can also store large quantities of water which is very useful for wild life.
- The sweetly scented flowers are favoured by many different insects.



Propagation

Baobab tree can be easily grown from seed in nurseries. Seeds are collected from mature fruits by breaking hard shell of the fruit and wash away the powdery pulp. The seeds are then soaked in hot water and left for 24 hours to absorb the moisture. They are then sown in seedbeds or polythene pots for germination process to occur however the best time for sowing is in spring and summer and in a well-drained soil. The sowing depth should be twice the size of the seed and should be covered with sand. Germination usually takes two to five weeks.