

MONKEY BREAD

Camel's Foot Leaf Tree

Piliostigma thonningii

Fabaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

Indigenous to Kenya, this shrub/small tree now grows all over sub-humid Africa in open woodlands, most often near the coast or large lakes.

Uses

The Monkey Bread tree has many uses for humans, animals and the soil. Humans eat the pulp, pods, fresh leaves, bark and substitute the green pods for soap. The greatest use is for making firewood and building construction but the gum tapped from the bark is used as caulking, the bark is made into rope, and extractions from various parts are used for dye and tannin. Cattle will eat the leaves, bark, pods and seeds. Bees find the blossoms are a good source of nectar. The tree is partly deciduous providing its own mulch but thick and strong enough to act as a live fence.

Common Names

- MAS
 - Olsagararami
- Swahili
 - Msaponi

Cultivation

Monkey Bread seeds will germinate in 60-75 days if soaked in cold water for 24-48 hours and the hard coat is nicked. Root suckers off established trees will root in the ground as another means to propagate. Since the Monkey Bread tree stays short but has a rounded crown that can spread to 15 m. it is often planted around homes for shade. It is a deep rooted tree making it less competitive when used in an agroforestry planting. It can be found growing from below sea level to 1850 m where rainfall is 700 mm/year. It will tolerate heavy clay soils that are somewhat acid. It will regrow quickly after being severely pruned.

Harvesting and Seed Production

This tree produces many large, heavy, woody pods, 15-20 cm in length, which turn from green to chestnut brown when ripe for hand picking. Pods should be picked daily to save them from animals and insects. Dry pods in the sun for 3-5 days, then break up or cut and pound to release the seeds. Dry in the sun for a few more days and seeds can then be stored for several years if kept, cool, dry and protected from insects.

Pests and Diseases

The pods do not drop off the tree so they are attractive food for monkeys. Elephants will eat pods and bark and insect pests eat the leaves. The wood is food for termites and other borers.

Cooking and Nutrition

Pods are eaten by livestock and humans. The leaves, roots and bark have various medicinal uses such as to treat wounds, ulcers, bleeding gums, and stomach and heart pains. It is said to be helpful in the coagulation of blood. People have found this a valuable tree during famine as edible parts include-green pods, leaves, bark and particularly the pulp surrounding the seeds in fresh pods.

References

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/treedb/AFTPDFS/Piliostigma_thonningii.PDF)