

In Zimbabwe the tree is mainly found in Southern parts of Midlands, Matabeleland South, and Mashonaland east, Masvingo and Manicaland

Uses and Economic value

The bark of the roots contain reserpine and alkaloids and other medicinal properties.

The western medicine is known for using Rauvolfia alkaloids such as reserpine, ajmalicine and ajmaline

The root, stem and bark are believed to have some antibacterial properties and also treat venereal diseases.

The bark is used to treat fever, swellings, and other ailments such as rheumatism, hepatitis, pneumonia, and stomach pain. It is also chewed to cure cough and toothache.

The barks can also be boiled and the steam inhaled to treat epilepsy and eye diseases. It can be crushed and applied to treat measles and rash

The leaves can be powdered and used to stop headaches.

The roots are believed to treat fever, swollen legs and palpitation of the heart. They are also used to cure constipation, stomach pains and hypertension

The tree is known in treating parasites and tapeworms including round worms. When mixed with honey, the root sap is used to treat fractures.

Fruits are also useful and are used to treat earaches when sap is extracted and dropped into ears.

The wood is soft and good for making small furniture and curios

The tree is used as an indicator species for ground water availability

The Tree is very good in catchment area protection and surface water protection.

It is useful in building of riverine forests.

Propagation



Rauvolfia caffra can be propagated by seed, cuttings and suckers. The quantity of kernels per kilogram are 4,500–5,000 per kg. The seed does not require much pre-treatment but the fruit pulp is removed by washing in water. When sown germination is fast and can be up to 80% within 14 days.

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(0242) - 498436-9 | +263 782 719 997 /999

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No. 1 Orange Grove Drive
P.O. Box HG 139, Highlands, Harare

Zimbabwe Tree Of The Year 2024



Botanical name: Rauvolfia caffra

Common name: Quinine tree

Shona name : Mukashu, Mudzurungu,
Mukamamasanhi,
Mukaurura,
Mutowamakaka

Ndebele name : Umkadhlwa,
Umhlambamanzi (Zulu)

Background

Rauvolfia caffra tree is a medium sized tree that can grow up to 40 meters in height and has a dense crown, straight bole which maybe buttressed sometimes. The diameter of the tree can go up to one meter. The tree is indigenous to Zimbabwe and other countries in Southern Africa.

Name Derivation

The scientific name *Rauvolfia caffra* was derived from Leonhart Rauwolf of Augsburg, a 16th century medical doctor who spent time in the Eastern Cape collecting medicinal plants. *Caffra* means Kaffraria which means the Eastern Cap. The name 'quinine tree' was derived from the fact that the bark of tree has a bitter property which was believed to contain quinine

Description

The tree has spreading crown which is sometimes rounded. It has relatively straight bole which may reach to 40m high but maybe shorter in areas outside the forests. It usually has a single trunk that has a diameter of up to 1,5m. The trunk is also slender and straight in most cases, and may be slightly buttressed. The bark is greyish to dark brown and may be rough, smooth or corky and in most cases cracked into small rectangle shapes. The leaves are oblong, shiny green and hairless which makes the tree mistaken for a Mango Tree. This Tree is an evergreen tree however the leaves fall but continuously form new ones, keeping the tree evergreen.

The tree belongs to the Apocynaceae family and includes the exotic genera *Oleander* and *Plumeria* (*Frangipani*). Indigenous genera containing trees on this site include *Acokanthera*, *Adenium*, *Carissa*, *Rauvolfia* and *Tabernaemontana*. Currently the family has 366 genera and in excess of 5 000 species.

Tree Structure



The leaves are in whorls of 3 to 5 oblong to elliptic shape. They may be 12 to 28 cm long and 3 to 6cm wide. They have thin leathery and glossy green at the top and dull paler green on the other side. They have a distinctive midrib and translucent veins and a tapering leaf base. The leaf margins are entire.

Flowers are white trumpet shaped and 4mm long and 2mm diameter, with dense heads at the end of the branches of the flower tubes. The flowers are also waxy, with a sweet scent. The flowering period is usually from July to October.

Seeds



Fruits



The fruit is near spherical with paired fleshy mericarps with dual lobes of about 1 to 1.5cm diameter. In some cases the fruit may have a single mericarp with one to two seeds. The fruits are green and turns black when ripe. The fruit is available from October to March.

Trunk



The trunk is also slender and straight in most cases, and may be slightly buttressed. The bark is greyish to dark brown and may be rough, smooth or corky and in most cases cracked into small rectangle shapes.

Bark



The bark is grey and brownish with fissures which makes it rough. It is corky but distinctively rippled and wrinkled when young, and it entirely contains milky latex.

Distribution and habitat

The tree is widespread in the tropics to the subtropics, from West Africa and Sudan south to Southern Africa where it grows at elevations up to 2,500 metres. It grows in areas where the mean temperatures range from 16 - 24°C and the mean annual rainfall from 500 - 1,270mm. It appears to prefer fairly fertile and well drained soils and grows in the wild on loamy sands to sandy clay-loam soils. When growing away from rivers and streams it is always associated with the availability of ground water.