



TREES AND PLANTS

AFRICAN BLACKWOOD

ABOUT

The African Blackwood (*Dalbergia melanoxylon*) is the national tree of Tanzania. In the Kiswahili language it is called Mpingo. It is a small, gnarled and heavily branched tree that grows very slowly and it doesn't reach harvestable age for 70 to 100 years. It has very dense, nearly black heartwood that is currently harvested for international trade, mainly from Tanzania and Mozambique. Mpingo (African Blackwood) is an important part of many ecosystems, such as the open Miombo woodland that covers two-thirds of Tanzania. It is a nitrogen fixing species that improves soil fertility and helps maintain soil stability. The leaves provide fodder for migrating herbivores on the east African savannahs and for domestic livestock. The mature trees are able to survive fires that sweep through grasslands destroying other vegetation. Mpingo grows in a variety of environmental conditions and is native to 26 African countries. It is often found in dry, rocky areas, although more frequently in the mixed deciduous forest and savannahs of the coastal regions of Tanzania and Mozambique.

DID YOU KNOW?

The dark heartwood of the Mpingo, which is why the west calls it African Blackwood, is one of the most economically valuable timbers in the world. It has perfect properties for carving and it has a wonderful finish. It is used for carving ornaments in Tanzania whilst the western world uses it to make woodwind instruments. The loss of the export and carving industries in Tanzania would ruin local economies and would devastate the instrument manufacturers in the west. In countries like Kenya the Mpingo is considered to be seriously threatened. High quality wood is becoming limited and although it is unlikely that it would become biologically extinct, it is at high risk of becoming locally and commercially extinct. Mature trees are being harvested at what seems an unsustainable rate since only 10-20% of harvestable trees contain timber suitable for export. For more information visit www.globaltrees.org.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

African Blackwood (Mpingo) is the national tree of which African country?

- a. Tanzania
- b. Kenya
- c. Mozambique
- d. Zambia

Answer is A.

