

A Rare Fruit Tree with Cultural Value: The Giant Yellow Mulberry

BY FRANCIS GACHATHI

The Giant Yellow Mulberry tree locally known as Mutuya is found in the central Kenya highlands, around Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares. This is an evergreen tree with very distinctive large compound (digitate) leaves made up of 5-7 leaflets. The leaflets are smooth and dark green above and pale greyish-green below with a dense velvety pubescence and distinctive veins. Flowers are unisexual, on separate trees. Scientifically, it is called *Myrianthus holstii*. It has very delicious yellow fruits consisting of separate segments, resembling a custard-apple or miniature pineapple. The giant yellow mulberry was a common reference in folktales of the local people. As a result of deforestation, the giant yellow mulberry is becoming very rare indeed. It is a tree worth protecting for our own heritage and for posterity. It can be propagated through seed. The seeds should be extracted from ripe fruits, cleaned and sown while still fresh. It is best between altitudes 1500-2200, with over 1000 mm annual rainfall.

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