

## Tree Species No. TTS9

### *Butryospermum parkii*, Family Sapotaceae

*Butryospermum parkii* is a medium sized, deciduous perennial tree from which shea butter is produced, an important source of vegetable fat in Africa. It is a relatively slow growing tree taking 30 years to reach maturity. It has some pesticidal properties, the leaves and fruit can be used as a repellent against stored grain pests. The butter tree is suited to sahelian and Sudanian climates.

**Synonyms:** *Vitellaria paradoxa*, *Bassia parkii*, *Butryospermum paradoxum ssp parkii*.

**Common names:** Butter tree, shea butter tree, shea nut, karité.

**Distribution:** The Shea butter tree is a savanna species extending from the northern regions of the Gambia to Uganda. It is widely distributed in the southern parts of the sahel and the savannas of Sudan and Guinea. Its present day distribution is widely the result of man's activities.

### Ecology

Rainfall: 600-1500mm.

Altitude: 0-1200m.

Soil type: The butter tree prefers dry sandy-clay soils with a good layer of humus. It dislikes swampy areas and regions that are prone to frequent flooding.

### Botany

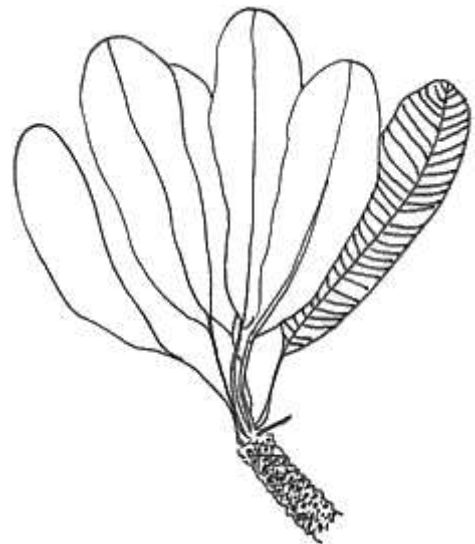
Height: 9-12m, but may reach 25m.

Diameter at breast height: 1.5-1.8m.

Crown: Large with many branches.

Flowers: The cream and white flowers occur in groups of 30 and appear during the dry season when the tree is leafless. The flowers are favoured by bees in the production of honey.

Fruit: The fruits are oval and grow to 5-8cm long.



## Uses

Main: Produces shea butter, a mixture of latex and fat that is an important source of vegetable fat. The wood is termite resistant and can be used for posts.

Yield: Usually begins producing fruit after 12 years and an average of 20kg per tree per year can be expected. In exceptional circumstances however, yields of up to 200kg per tree have been recorded.

## Cultural instructions

Seeds: The seed is best sown directly in the field because it develops a long tap root that makes transplanting difficult.

Germination: Germinates easily.

Nursery: If grown in a nursery, transplant with care and grow in polythene bags to limit damage to the taproot.

Management: Because of its slow growth it is important to weed regularly to reduce competition with weeds. During early growth protect from browsing and fire.

Spacing: 10-12 trees per hectare is usual, however, if conditions are good and rainfall is guaranteed between 750 and 1000mm then they can be spaced as densely as 30-50 per hectare.

## Other

Pests and diseases: The larva of *Cirina butyospermi*, *Loranthus spp* and *Anacridium moestum* can cause considerable damage to the leaves, and the larva of *Mussidia nigrioella* and *Ceratitis silvestrii* parasitise the pulp of mature fruits.

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