

*Dalbergia melanoxylon*

[Synonyms : *Amerimnon melanoxylon*]

**AFRICAN BLACKWOOD** is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to tropical Africa it has small fragrant, pea-like, yellowish-white flowers.

It is also known as African ebony, African grenadille wood, *Babanus* (Arabic), Blackwood, Ebony, *Grenadilla* (Mozambican), Mozambique ebony, *Mpingo* (Swahili), *Mubingu* (Kikuyu), *Mufunjo* (Ugandan), *Mugembe* (Tanzanian), *Mukelete* (Zimbabwean), Senegal ebony, and Unyoro ebony.

*Melanoxylon* is made up of Greek *melano-* (black) and *-xylon* (wood) components.

The 'ebony' of ancient Egypt was often imported African blackwood. This wood was highly prized and used to make special items of furniture. It has been identified in many of the objects found in the Egyptian tombs, not least that of the famous boy-king, Tut'ankhamun (died c.1340 BC). Authorities marvel that African blackwood was often used then as a veneer as it is not known how the Egyptians were able to work such an extremely hard wood.

The wood is often used today as a substitute for ebony (*Diospyros ebenum*).

Although locally the wood has been used for turning and inlay work (as well as for making hammers, arrows, knife handles and walking sticks) elsewhere (and still at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries) it has often been used for furniture and musical instruments eg. xylophone bars. Scotland first adopted the bagpipe in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century from central and southern Europe where it had been made out of the wood of local trees. In modern times African blackwood has often been used for this instrument and it can also be found in clarinets, oboes, violins and guitars. (At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century however some authorities expressed concern about the wood's evident popularity for musical instruments as they believed this contributed significantly to the tree's by then threatened state.) The wood is also used for carving ornaments, especially locally, and use of it within sustainable programmes is actively encouraged.

Medicinally, herbalists have recommended the roots locally as a remedy for toothache.