

Pterocarpus angolensis

[Synonyms : *Pterocarpus bussei*, *Pterocarpus dekindtianus*, *Pterocarpus dekindtianus* var. *latifoliolatus*]

WEST AFRICAN BARWOOD is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to tropical southern central Africa and to South Africa, it has small pea-like, fragrant orange-yellow flowers. It is also known as African teak, Bleedwood tree, Bloodwood tree, Brown African padauk, *Kajat* (Afrikaans), *Kiatt* (Afrikaans), *Mtumbati* (Tanzanian), *Mubvamaropa* (Shona), *Mukwa* (Zimbabwean), *Muninga*, *Mutete* (Angolan), Transvaal teak, *Umvagazi* (Zimbabwean), and *umVangatsi* (Swazi).

Cuts made in the bark release a sticky blood-red sap known as *umVangatsi* in Swaziland.

Warning – the dust from working the wood can cause nasal irritation and asthma.

The tree is becoming rare in its native habitat because it has been over-exploited. It is a protected species in the wild in the Transvaal (northern South Africa).

Angolensis means ‘of or from Angola’.

This tree according to some experts is a good bee plant.

The bristle-tipped leaflets and shoots have provided fodder for livestock, and it is a source of food for wildlife. Elephants browse on the foliage and enjoy the small disc-like winged fruit pods. Baboons and chimpanzees eat the young leaf shoots, flowers, fruit pods and seeds.

The sticky red sap yields a permanent red dye.

Authorities note that many Africans believe this is the best wood for making canoes – and it has also provided material for canoe paddles, hunting spears and drums. Its very hard, strong and durable, faintly aromatic pale brown to golden- or reddish-brown wood has offered an alternative to Indian teak (*Tectona grandis*) and has been used for joinery, turning, carving and veneering – and more specifically for flooring, boatbuilding, building interiors and for poles, as well as for making furniture and mortars. Occasionally it has been burnt as fuel.

Locally the roots have been admired as an aphrodisiac.

Medicinally, local herbalists have applied a bark infusion to nettle rash and oral ulcers and have recommended that it be taken for easing stomach upsets and headaches. A root decoction has offered a remedy for blackwater fever, and malaria – and bark and root have offered a treatment for some venereal disease. Eye ulcers have been treated with the root and flowers. The tree has also been a source of medicine for bilharzia, backache, tuberculosis, asthma and ringworm.