

*Cupressus lusitanica*

## Cupressaceae

## Mexico, Guatemala

**COMMON NAMES:** **English:** Mexican cypress; **Kikuyu:** Mutarakwa, Muthithinda; **Kisii:** Omobakora; **Luhya:** Mudarakwa; **Luo:** Obudo.

**DESCRIPTION:** An evergreen tree to 35 m with a straight trunk, generally conical but irregular in shape, the branches hang down with branchlets in all directions. **BARK:** Red-brown with vertical grooves, grey with age. **LEAVES:** Dull blue-green, the tiny leaves in 4 ranks, with pointed tips. **CONES:** Male like fat tips to branchlets, producing clouds of yellow pollen dust; female cones ripen in 2 years, rounded, 1.5 cm across, brown, the cone scales with central, pointed projections. About 75 winged seeds are released from beneath the cone scales.

**ECOLOGY:** The Mexican cypress originates from the moist mountain forests of Mexico and Central America. It grows best above 1,500 m altitude with good soil and fair rainfall. In 1992, this fast-growing cypress represented over 40% of the plantation areas in Kenya, where it was introduced before 1910. Since 1990, severely attacked by the cypress aphid; branches turn yellow, later dry out. Aphids are difficult to control and thus planting cannot be recommended until a solution (biological control) becomes available. Agroclimatic Zones II–III. Flowers in most areas from June–October and seeds in November–May.

**USES:** Firewood, timber (construction wood, pulpwood), furniture, poles, posts, shade, ornamental, windbreak, live fence, toothbrushes, brooms.

**PROPAGATION:** Seedlings.

**SEED:** Average 215,000 seeds per kg; germination rate 30–45% in 10–20 days. The right time for collection is when the cones start to turn brown. After collection the cones are dried in the sun until they open. The seeds can then be separated from the cones by shaking on a sieve. Sow in a seedbed and prick out.

**treatment:** Not necessary.

**storage:** Seed can be stored for some months but viability is gradually reduced.

**MANAGEMENT:** Fast growing on good sites, moderate on poorer sites. Prune and thin trees in woodlots if objective is good-quality timber. Does not coppice.

**REMARKS:** Can produce poles after 10 years, general-purpose timber after 20 years. Not good for intercropping. The aphid problem calls for restricted planting. Introduced and became an invasive species in parts of Malawi.

**FURTHER READING:** <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Albrecht, 1993; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Dharani, 2002; Katende et al., 1995; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990.

