

Adansonia species

Adansonia digitata – African Baobab

Adansonia gregorii – Australian Baobab

The Baobab is a well known and easily recognised feature of dry landscape. This tree grows in the wild to 14 metres and develops a huge swollen bottle-like trunk. It is deciduous with palmate leaves with each leaflet growing to 13cm. An often overlooked facet of this tree are the flowers and fruits. The large white flowers with fluffy prominent anthers (as illustrated) appear on long stalks in late spring or early summer. It also produces ball-like fruits that grow to 10cm in diameter. The flesh of the fruits is edible and has a sherbet-like tang and are often carved as novelties.

Easily propagated from seed this tree grows quickly at first and then more slowly with age. Suited to tropical or sub-tropical climates it lends itself to bonsai or can be grown as a tub plant or indoors in soil-based potting mix in full light until it becomes too large. When grown outdoors it prefers moderately fertile sandy soil in a sunny position.

With its huge bottles and frequently forked trunks the baobab makes a stunning feature tree. In Australia the baobab grows well in northern areas and as a feature in Brisbane. Where not hardy, grow indoors in soil-based potting mix in full light.

The baobab is not a difficult plant to propagate from seed. The seed has a hard outer shell casing and it helps to nick the coating with a sharp knife to break this, or some use a hacksaw to cut into the seed to achieve this. Soak the seed overnight in initially boiling water prior to sowing. Seed needs high temperatures to germinate readily, at least 22°C daytime temperature.

Sow the seed in a potting mix of compost (rotten leaves), ordinary soil, and sand in equal quantities. Cover the seed as deep as its own size, keep moist but not wet. These are deep-rooted seedlings so use a pot with some depth – say at least 15cm deep.

Plant out at least 10cm once the danger of frost has passed. Water in well and then as needed until established but remember that baobab is dormant in the winter and it is not to be watered in winter months. It may need regular watering in its first summer, dependent upon local conditions. Be prepared to give the succulent young shoots some protection from vermin.