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Why 'Mugavu' tree should find space in your garden

The *albizia coriaria* is the native species in the East African region accessible to many farmers for purposes of the highly valued hardwood timber, medicine, shade for the crops and soil improvement purpose.

BY DAN WANDERA

For a long time, the Mugavu (*Albizia*) has found space and survived as a tree that gives ample shade to sections of banana and coffee gardens.

But the Mugavu, that is also vulnerable to the hardwood tree hunters for timber, could be a game changer for your soil health.

While a section of the farmers believe the Mugavu tree, unlike many other tree species ensures that the soils retain some water, the ability to help regenerate the soils naturally as a nitrogen fixer and nutrient cycling through the leaves that drop and get decomposed add to the organic carbon in the soils, farmer ex-

perts reveal.

Because of its ability to act as a low cost fertiliser that naturally fixes the missing soil nutrients, the Mugavu is among the common tree species that locally appears in almost 80 percent of the coffee and banana plantations in Uganda.

Mr Joseph Lwevuze, a coffee farmer in Ntangala Village in Katikamu Sub-county, Luweero District, reflects on the benefits that the Mugavu tree has contributed to his garden that earlier suffered inadequate nutrient content in the past 10-years.

"I don't encourage farmers to congest the garden with the Mugavu trees but ensure that the garden has some trees to help provide the

shelter which is the most visible value by local farmers. The hidden values include the ability to fix nitrogen through its root systems, break the soils for water retention while the dropping leaves and twigs add more fertility to the soils. I have several Mugavu trees on my 10-acre coffee plot," he says.

For farmers adopting agroforestry models, integrating Mugavu and other tree species into farm plots represents a modern, eco-friendly farming practice that helps address climate change challenges affecting farmers in Uganda and globally.

Mr Derick Kavuma, a farmer trainer, explains that many other tree species are available as nitrogen fixers, among other uses but Mugavu is the most common tree species that is easily available.

"For our local farmers, the Mugavu/*Albizia* is one of the indigenous tree species that has survived extinction amid the forest trees and vegetation destruction. The advantage of the Mugavu tree species is its ability to withstand harsh weath-

er conditions, shade leaves but remain relevant to the soils through its natural root process as a nitrogen fixer. Very few farmers growing coffee and banana dispute the relevance of the Mugavu tree," he says.

Because of its multiple advantages including the hardwood, the Mugavu tree is now among the most hunted trees for its durability in both construction purposes and furniture making. But this should not stop them from growing them, Mr Kavuma explains.

"This is the very reason why we advise our farmers to go into agro-forestry where tree species can be grown alongside the other plants. For farmers practicing regenerative farming, the ability to maintain an evergreen environment will not be lost," he says.

Adding value to the soils;

One of the most known uses is the ability to act as a nitrogen fixer for the soils as a leguminous plant.

The trees reportedly convert atmospheric nitrogen to valuable chemical nutrients in the form of nitrogen.

The ability to help the soils balance the soil (PH) where soil acidity gets filtered to the benefit of the plants in particular soils is among the many other uses of the Mugavu tree.

While the Mugavu tree could take about 10 to 15 years to mature, the soil benefits begin as early as three-years in the process of tree maturity, Mr Joseph Lwevuze, a farmer trainer explains.

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