

gastrointestinal issues like diarrhoea, constipation, and stomach ulcers. Its leaves and bark have been used traditionally to treat respiratory ailments such as asthma, cough, bronchitis, and sinus infections. Drinking an infusion of the leaves or bark may help regulate blood sugar levels and support overall metabolic health.

**Other products:** The seeds are used to decorate trinkets, bracelets and necklaces.

## Ecosystem Services

**Erosion control:** The species is used on stream banks and for soil conservation terraces.

**Shade or shelter:** The tree is grown as a shade plant in coffee plantations and grazing fields.

**Nitrogen-fixing:** The roots of trees are infected by Rhizobia nodulates and fix atmospheric nitrogen

**Soil improvement:** Leaf fall in the dry season is a source of mulch.

**Ornamental:** The tree is a popular ornamental in the tropics and subtropics.

**Boundary or barrier or support:** The tree has the useful characteristic of sprouting from truncheons if cut just before flowering, and so can be used to make a live fence.

**Intercropping:** The tree is usually combined with annual crops, especially when it is grown in rotation with coffee or cocoa.

## Conservation Status

*Erythrina abyssinica* is not currently listed as threatened; however, localized overharvesting for medicinal use may pose risks. Sustainable management and enrichment planting are recommended.

## Relevance of the species

The species is highly suitable for;

- Dryland forest and woodland restoration.
- Community forestry and agroforestry initiatives.
- Climate change adaptation and soil rehabilitation programmes.
- Biodiversity enhancement in degraded landscapes

The selection of Mutiti as Zimbabwe's Tree of the Year 2026 is both a celebration and a call to action.


Let us plant it, protect it, and promote it. Let us recognise its ecological, cultural, and economic value.


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**FORESTRY COMMISSION**



# ZIMBABWE TREE OF THE YEAR 2026



Scientific Name  
*Erythrina abyssinica*

## Common names

- Red-hot-poker tree (English)
- Lucky-bean tree (English)
- Mutiti (Shona)
- Munhimbiti (Shona)
- Mutete (Shona)
- Mutsiti (Shona)
- Umgqogqogqo (Ndebele)

## Species Information

*Erythrina abyssinica* is a small to medium deciduous, fire resistant and drought-tolerant tree indigenous to Zimbabwe. It is recognised for its striking scarlet-red flowers blooming on leafless branches.

## Derivation of botanical name

The species derive its name from Greek/Latin roots meaning "red" (*Erythros*) and its origin in Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia).

## Habitat and Distribution

*Erythrina abyssinica* is the most widespread species in Africa, occurring naturally in Zimbabwe, parts of Mozambique, Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania, DRC and Ethiopia. As with many trees in areas with frequent fires, the young trees establish a deep root system before stem growth.

## Identifying *Erythrina abyssinica*

A medium sized, thickset with a well branched, rounded, spreading crown, usually 5 to 10 m in height. It has a well-branched, rounded or spreading crown.



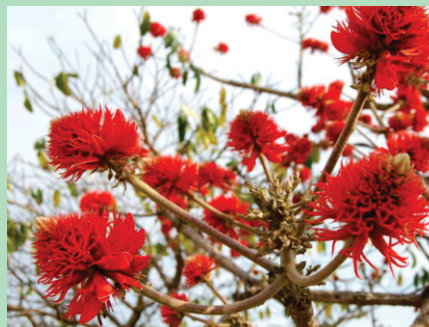
The **bark** is thickly corky and light brown to grey. It is soft, very rough, and vertically fissured. Young, initially hairy **stems** become hairless. Scattered spines are present. When damaged the tree exudes a brown, gummy sap.

## Leaves



Leaves compound, trifoliate, alternate; leaflets almost as broad as long, 5.5-15 x 6-14cm, with the terminal leaflet the largest; lateral leaflets rather smaller than this, if 3 lobed then obscurely so, densely woolly when young, losing most of these hairs by maturity; midrib and main veins on the undersurface often bear scattered prickles.

## Flowers



Flowers spectacular, in strong, sturdy racemes on the ends of branchlets, orange-red, up to 5cm long; calyx joined to form a tube, split along the under surface almost to the base and separating away into long, slender, distinctive lobes at the apex; calyx and standard petal striking scarlet to brick red (July to November).

## Fruit



The dehiscent, cylindrical, light brown, woody and usually hairy fruit is a pod from 4-15cm long. Prickles are present. Between 1 and 10 seeds are produced in each pod. When more than 1 seed is present, the sickle-shaped pod is moniliform (resembling a string of beads) – deeply constricted between the seeds. The ellipsoid seeds are bright red with a conspicuous hilum (black spot indicating the point of previous attachment to the ovary wall). The mass of dry seeds is about 1kg for 1 000 seeds. (Nov-Mar)

## Propagation

The species is commonly propagated via large truncheons (cuttings) planted in rainy season or scarified seeds. It thrives in full sun, well-draining loamy/clay soils.

**Cuttings (Best Method):** Use large, 2.5–3m long truncheons (8-10 cm diameter), stripped of leaves, and plant at the onset of the rainy season.

**Seeds:** Possess a hard coat requiring pretreatment (scarification, nicking, or hot water soaking) to improve low germination rates.

**Inoculation:** Seeds should be inoculated with Rhizobium to promote nitrogen-fixing nodules.

**Soil and Site:** Prefers deep, well-drained soil (pH 3.5–5.5), tolerating poor, clay, or loamy soil.

## Uses

**Fodder:** The foliage is considered a good protein supplement for ruminants (cattle, sheep and goats) and has been used as a fodder source for rabbits and pigs.

**Apiculture:** The tree provides bees with forage.

**Fuel:** The tree may be cut for firewood.

**Timber:** The termite-resistant wood is soft, greyish-white, non-durable, susceptible to fungal attack, and with a shot-silk effect. Although it is somewhat woolly to work, it does not split when nailed but has poor nail-holding ability. It has been used to make stools, toys, drums, utensils, mortars, beehives, pestles, boxes, picture frames, floors, shoes and for construction.

**Tannin or dyestuff:** The bark and roots yield useful dyes.

**Medicine:** The bark is most commonly used in traditional medicine, to treat snakebites, malaria, sexually transmittable diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhoea, cough, liver inflammation, stomach-ache, and measles. Roasted and powdered bark is applied to burns, ulcers and swellings. The bark is also applied against vomiting. Roots are taken to treat peptic ulcers, epilepsy, malaria, and schistosomiasis. Leaves are applied externally to wounds and painful joints; they are also applied to treat skin diseases in cattle. Fruit extracts are taken to treat asthma and meningitis. The leaves and bark have been used in traditional medicine to address