

## Baobab Tree

Scientific Name: *Adansonia* spp

Irish Name: Baobab



Image courtesy of Bernard Gagnon - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adansonia#/media/File:Adansonia\\_grandidieri04.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adansonia#/media/File:Adansonia_grandidieri04.jpg)

*Adansonia grandidieri* in Madagascar, sometimes known as the Grandidier's Baobab.



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The palmate, or palm-like, leaves of the *Adansonia digitata* tree. Baobab trees are an important nesting site for birds.



Image courtesy of Jose Antonio

The fruit of the *Adansonia rubrostipa* tree.

The Baobab tree is native to Madagascar, mainland Africa and Australia. It has a very unusual shape, with a very thick barrel-like trunk and relatively short, stubby branches. It is known by some as the "upside down tree". When its leaves have fallen, the tangled branches look like the tree is growing with its roots in the air. The trunk is made of fibrous wood and its diameter can increase and decrease over time as it is thought to store water in the trunk when supplies are good to protect it for drought. Depending on the species, the baobab tree can grow between 5-25 metres in height.

Baobab trees are deciduous and only have leaves for about three months each year. The palm-like leaves begin growing at the start of the rainy season and fall off when the dry season arrives. The rainy season and dry season are typical of a hot, tropical climate where Baobab trees like to live. Baobab trees produce large white flowers at dusk but they are very short-lived, only flowering for a few hours before fading. The flowers, which are smelly, are usually pollinated by bats and produce hard-shelled fruit. Inside kidney-shaped seeds are surrounded by pulp.

The baobab is one of the longest-lived flowering plants in the world. In Zimbabwe, an African Baobab tree known as the Panke Baobab died in 2011 and when it was radiocarbon dated, it was discovered to be 2,450 years old!

Climate change and population growth have been suggested as reasons for the death, in recent years, of a number of Baobab trees in Africa.



There are eight species of baobab tree in the world, six of which grow only in Madagascar, where a number of them are endangered. One such species is the Grandidier Baobab, which is the biggest of them all and its trunk can grow to three metres across. These impressive trees are a major tourist attraction in Madagascar.

### A Tree of Life

In Africa, Baobab trees have great cultural significance for the people that live near them. The trees are also important because all parts of the tree have value:

- the bark and trunk have fire-resistant properties and can be made into anything from rope to cloth to musical instruments;
- its leaves can be eaten like spinach and have many medicinal properties;
- the fruit's pulp is one of most nutrient-rich foods in the world and can be eaten or ground to make a drink.
- its seeds can be ground to make oil.
- its pollen can be made into glue.
- the tree itself has been used for shelter, food store or even a place for burial.