

Vocanga - Vocanga

- Apocynaceae - Tropical zones in Africa



Botanical information

An evergreen tree, it grows to a height of 6m with a spread of 2m, but is usually kept smaller in cultivation. The stem is erect and branching, the leaves are broadly oval and up to 30cm long; the fruit are berries containing several brown seed which are irregularly shaped, the cluster somewhat resembling a brain.

A native of the West African rainforests, it prefers well composted rich soils in a protected sunny to part shade position, and is drought and frost tender.

Propagation is from fresh seed or cuttings. Sterilise seed in 6% hydrogen peroxide for 10 minutes, then plant about 10mm deep in sterilised sand or seedraising mix. Application of a systemic fungicide may be needed to control fungal infections which readily spread from unviable seed. Fresh seed germinates much quicker than older seed.

Pharmacology

As a close relative of *Tabernanthe iboga* and many other psychoactive members of the Apocynaceae, *Voacanga* species are generally ingested to increase endurance and stamina and also for magic and religious purposes. The seeds of *Voacanga africana* contain up to 10% indolealkaloids, including voacamine, voacangine and many related compounds. The same alkaloids are found in the bark, but in much lower levels (~2%). This group of indole alkaloids when ingested causes a mild to strong stimulation lasting several hours. Higher doses have a strong hallucinogenic effect.

TRADITIONAL PREPARATION: *Voacanga africana* is one of the well guarded secrets of the African Magic Healers. Little is known about the actual use of the seeds and the bark of several *Voacanga* species (including *V.africana*), other than that the plant is held in high esteem for ritual purposes. The use of seeds for visionary experiences has been documented.