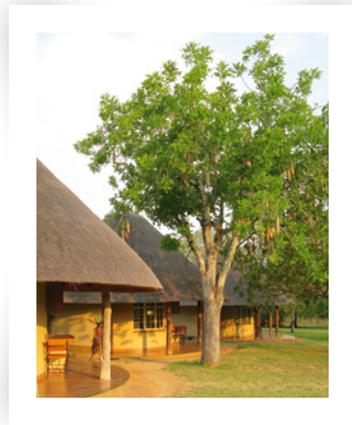


Sausage tree

The shade of a sausage tree is perfect for a picnic, provided you're not directly below when a hefty fruit plummets. Illustrations by Daleen Roodt



A sausage tree outside some Pretoriuskop rondavels. Each fruit can weigh up to 12 kg.



The straw-coloured fruit bat feels secure visiting the blossoms of the sausage tree as they shelter below dense foliage.

WHEN YOU SEE A TREE laden with huge sausage-shaped fruit hanging from long stalks, consider carefully where you position yourself to admire it. Those bizarre fruit can get up to a metre in length and take up to a year to ripen, so the possibility of one falling on you, with potentially serious consequences, is ever present.

The sausage tree *Kigelia Africana* is a member of that showiest families of flowering trees, the *Bignonia* family, which includes jacaranda. Growing close to rivers and streams, the tree's mushroom-shaped, bright-green canopy can reach an imposing height of 20 metres. In areas with dry seasons, the branches are bare for a brief period at the end of winter.

For about eight weeks in spring, the trees display flamboyant, bell-shaped, deep red blooms, which attract an array of animals. The scent is rather unappealing to humans,

The ripe fruit (it is sometimes baked) is used to brew beer.

but birds, insects, antelopes and primates seem oblivious. The smell is most powerful at night, when it lures the straw-coloured fruit bat *Eidolon helvum*, the main pollinator of this species.

The leaves of the tree are eaten by Bushveld herbivores such as elephant and kudu. Although not their favourite takeout, the enormous sausages are eaten by baboons, monkeys, porcupines, bushpigs, hippos and birds. Even grazing animals such as zebra and giraffe manage to chew the pulpy fibre, which is filled with seeds that are spread in animal dung.

Wood from the sausage tree with its straight trunk is exceptionally useful because it is water resistant and doesn't crack easily, making it suitable for dugout canoes and oars. The leaves are used medicinally to treat pneumonia and backache. 🐾

Kigelia africana

"Worsboom"

The sausage tree is sacred to many communities, featuring in myths and legends, healing and sustenance.



ILLUSTRATION OWNED BY DAAN SCHOEMAN FINANCIAL PLANNING SOLUTIONS

Daleen Roodt