Ficus sycomorus Moraceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Oda, Woda; **Chonyi:** Mukuyu; **Embu:** Mukuyu, Nguyu; **English:** Sycamore fig; **Ilchamus:** Lnaboli; **Kamba:** Makuyu (fruit), Mukuyu; **Kikuyu:** Mukuyu, Nguyu (fruit); **Kipsigis:** Mogoiwet; **Kisii:** Omoku; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumukhuyu, Kamakhuyu (fruit); **Luhya (Tachoni):** Omukhuyu, Amakhuyu (fruit); **Luo:** Olam, Odok (Ugenya), Ng'owa, Ng'owu, Powo; **Maasai:** Olng'aboli; **Malakote:** Mokoyo; **Marakwet:** Mokungua, Mokongwo, Makany (plural); **Mbeere:** Mukuyu; **Meru:** Mukuyu, Mukuu, Nguyu (fruit); **Nandi:** Sebetuet, Sebetwet; **Orma:** Odha; **Pokot:** Mangang (plural), Mokongwo; **Rendille:** Bubunto, Ilmo (fruit); **Samburu:** Lngaboli; **Sanya:** Odha; **Somali:** Bardah (Tana River), Berde; **Swahili:** Mukuyu, Mkuyu; **Taita:** Mku; **Teso:** Eborborei, Eduro; **Tugen:** Lokoiwo, Lokoek (fruit); **Turkana:** Echoke.

DESCRIPTION: A large semi-deciduous spreading tree to 25 m, sometimes with stem buttresses and the **base commonly spreading over the ground.** Abundant latex when cut. BARK: Distinctive **yellow to cream-brown, smooth,** older stems have rectangular scales that fall leaving pale brown patches. LEAVES: Oval to **almost circular,** to 15 cm, upper surface rough to touch, margin wavy, roughly toothed, **base heart-shaped, a hairy stalk to 3 cm.** FIGS: In leaf axils in pairs or in dense clusters on main branches and trunk, **each rounded, 1.5–5 cm across, usually about 3 cm when fresh, wider at the tip, densely hairy and yellow-red when ripe.**

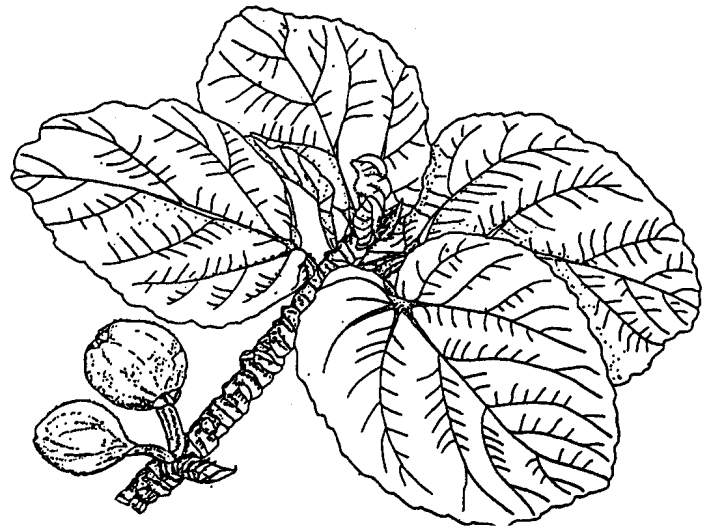
ECOLOGY: Occurs from the Middle East west to Cape Verde Islands and south to South Africa, Namibia and the Comoro Islands. Widely distributed all over Kenya in riverine vegetation, on flood plains and places with high groundwater. Found away from riverine vegetation in humid and subhumid zones. Grows in alluvial, sandy or rocky soils, 0–2,000 m. Rainfall 250 mm (riverine) to 1,200 mm, or even more. Agroclimatic Zones II–VII. Fruits in January–March in Tana River, Marsabit and southern Turkana and in April (occasionally December–February) in Machakos, Makueni, Narok and Taita.

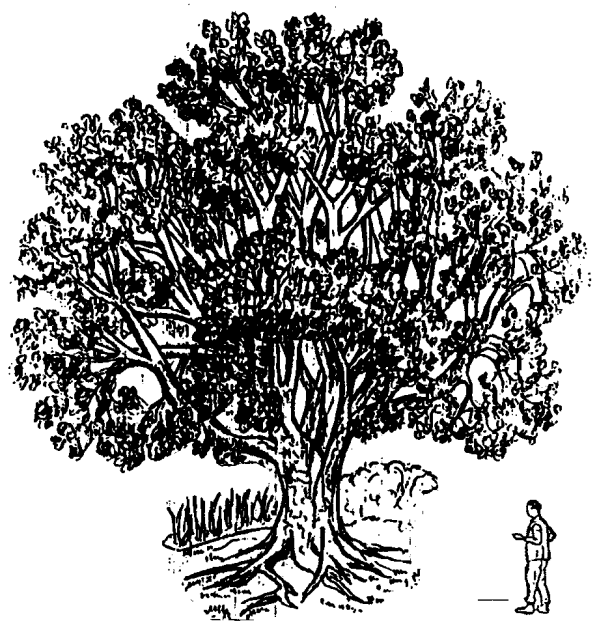
USES: Firewood, timber (door frames, house construction), furniture (stools), beehives, carvings, utensils (pestles and mortars, musical instruments, water troughs, bowls), boat building (canoes), food (edible fruit and inner bark), medicine (milky latex), fodder (leaves, fruit), shade, ornamental, mulch, soil conservation and improvement, sand and river-bank stabilization, fibre (chewed inner bark), glue (latex used for arrows), veterinary medicine, ceremonial.

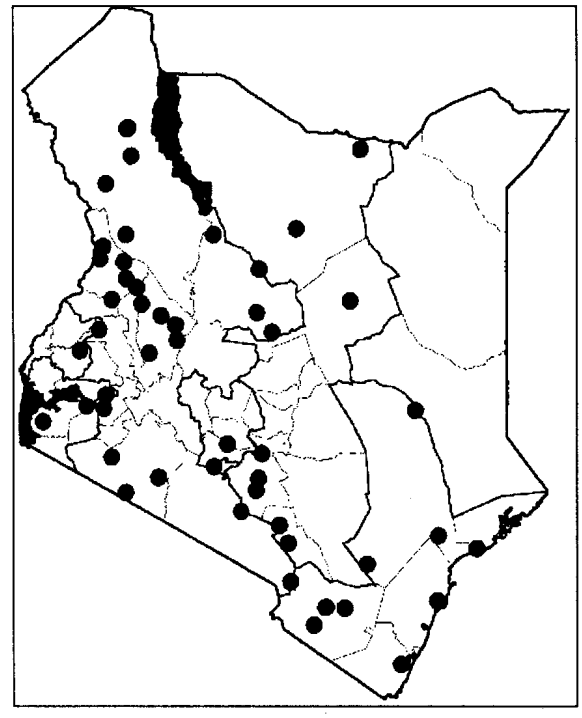
PROPAGATION: Cuttings.

MANAGEMENT: Fairly fast growing; pruning, lopping. Managed to reduce shade when intercropped. In western Kenya, bananas are often grown underneath it.

REMARKS: Figs fleshy, sweet and eaten raw or cooked. They can be dried and have a good flavour and high food value. Also eaten by livestock, birds and game. A sacred tree among many communities (Boran, Kamba, Kikuyu, Mbeere, Tharaka, Meru, Luo). Wood is light, pale and







Ficus sycomorus (cont)

easy to work. Another fig, *F. bussei* (**Digo/Giriama:** Mugandi), is found at the coast with *F. sycomorus*. It has grey fluted bark, usually many aerial roots and small green figs with white bumps. The Giriama leave it standing and use the bark fibres for string. A related fig is *F. vallis-choudae* (**Luo:** Ng'owo; **Maasai:** Mutoyo; **Pokot:** Nokow'o), a huge tree to 25 m high with a low crown, large (to 20 cm) heart-shaped to almost circular leaves with a wavy margin, and large finely hairy solitary figs to 5 cm in diameter. This tree is usually riverine. The figs are edible, while the wood is used in building and furniture.

There are over 30 indigenous species of figs in Kenya. Most have edible figs; they are good shade trees and the wood may be used as firewood.

FURTHER READING: http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm; Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Bein et al., 1996; Dharani, 2002; ITDG and IIRR, 1996; Katende et al., 1995, 1999; Kokwaro, 1993; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979; van Wyk, 1993.