Ficus thonningii (F. dekdekana) Moraceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Strangler fig; **Kamba:** Kiumo, Maumo (fruit); **Kikuyu:** Mugumo; **Kipsigis:** Simotuet; **Kisii:** Omogumu; **Luhya:** Lutoto; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumutoto kumusecha; **Luo:** Pocho; **Maasai:** Oreteti, Olreteti; **Marakwet:** Simotuet, Simotwo, Simat; **Mbeere:** Mugumo; **Meru:** Mugumo; **Nandi:** Simotuet; **Pokot:** Simotwo; **Sabaot:** Simotuet; **Samburu:** Reteti, Labuli; **Somali:** Kalejeje; **Swahili:** Mlandege; **Taita:** Mvumo, Mvumu.

DESCRIPTION: A large evergreen tree to 20 m or more, with a low, dense, rounded crown, often epiphytic initially (growing on other larger trees, the association often leading to the death of the host species by strangling). BARK: Thin, **grey and smooth. Aerial roots often present**. White latex produced when the plant is injured. LEAVES: **Very variable, oval to 12 cm**, often smaller, **tip mostly rounded**, base rounded or tapering, shiny green, young leaves pale and hairy below. FIGS: **In clusters from the leaf axils at the ends of branches**, prominent on the bare tree, **round to 1.5 cm**, smooth or bumpy, **yellow or purple-red when ripe. Two small leafy bracts remain at the base of the fig.**

ECOLOGY: Widespread from Ethiopia west to Cape Verde Islands and south to South Africa and Angola. Widely distributed in Kenya in upland forests, dry forest remnants, open or wooded grassland and along rivers. The commonest strangler fig in Kenya, often starting as an epiphyte on another tree. Often left in cropland. Grows on a variety of soils, but more common near streams in dry areas, 300–2,300 m. Agroclimatic Zones II–V.

USES: Firewood, medicine, fodder, food (edible fruit), medicine (bark), shade, ornamental, mulch, green manure, fibre (basket making), glue (latex used as glue for arrows), dye, live fence, ceremonial.

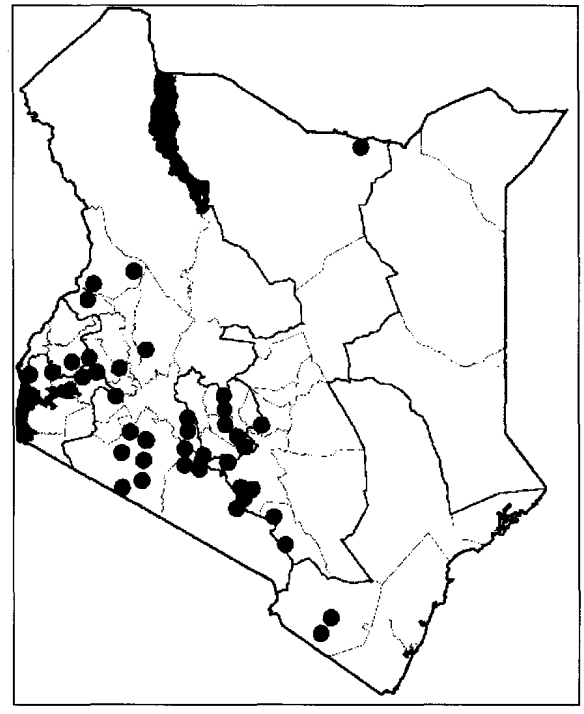
PROPAGATION: Cuttings, wildings. Large cuttings normally used.

SEED: About 90,000 seeds per kg.
treatment: Not necessary.
storage: Seeds should not be stored.

MANAGEMENT: Fast growing from cuttings, making it a better option than raising seedlings; pollarding.

REMARKS: A traditional place for offering sacrifices (Kamba, Kikuyu, Mbeere, Meru, Pokot, Maasai) and hence a sacred tree. Fruit eaten by small mammals and birds, thus dispersing the seed. Protect from browsing when young. Not planted near buildings as the roots may crack foundations.

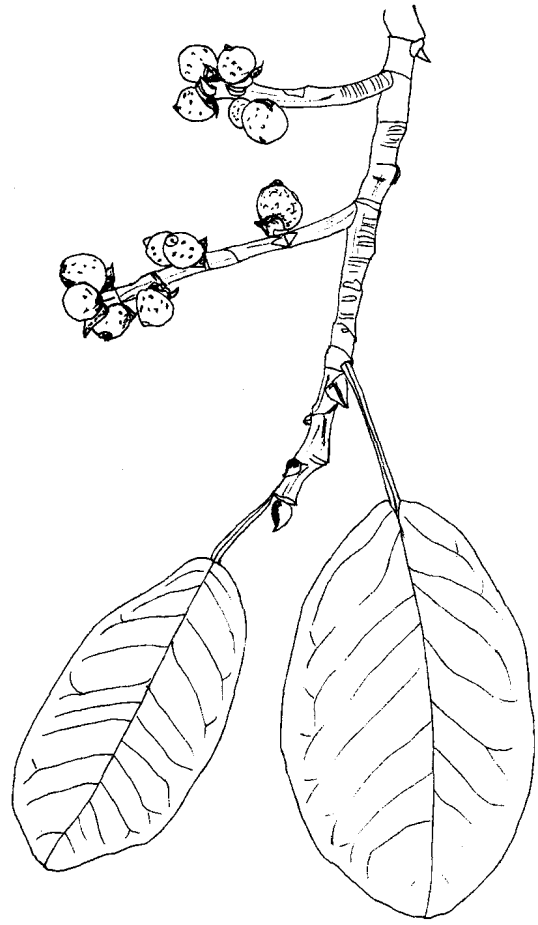
Another fig, *F. natalensis* (**English:** Barkcloth fig; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumuruba; **Pokomo:** Mvuma), is very similar and often confused with *F. thonningii* but is less common in Kenya; mainly found in western Kenya and at the coast. Figs are small, 0.6–1 cm in diameter, smooth



Ficus thonningii (cont)

or slightly hairy and with or without a visible stalk. The figs have persistent bracts at the base of the fruit, but these fall early in *F. natalensis*. The leaves are usually smaller than in the other species and tend to be widest above the middle and taper to the base. The tip is more rounded. This is also a ceremonial tree in many communities. *Ficus glumosa* (**Boran:** Kiltaa; **Kamba:** Kionywe; **Kipsigis:** Chilgotwet; **Maasai:** Olngaboli; **Somali:** Berde) is a tree to 15 m high, with a spreading crown, smooth grey bark and usually hairy leaves with a heart-shaped base. The figs are orange to red, small, up to 1.2 cm, usually hairy and without a visible stalk. Found from West Africa east to Yemen and south to South Africa. *F. ingens* (**Kamba:** Kionywe; **Kipsigis:** Chemul mogoyuet; **Maasai:** Onogoret; **Sabaot:** Cheptapasya; **Teso:** Ereere) is a tree to 20 m high with a dense crown, sometimes establishing and growing on other trees (epiphytic). The figs are pink to purple, small, up to 1.2 cm, usually hairy and without a visible stalk. Found from Senegal west to Ethiopia and Yemen and south to Angola, Botswana and South Africa. Distributed in the drier parts from the coast to the western part of Kenya at 150–2,600 m, usually on lava and rocky places as well as riverine gorges. Leaves are used for medicine. The wood is used to make doors and stools by the Kipsigis and firesticks by the Maasai.

FURTHER READING: http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm; Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Dharani, 2002; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990; von Maydell, 1990.



F. natalensis