

Gardenia volkensii**Rubiaceae****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Digo:** Mchimwemwe; **Giriama:** Mkimwemwe; **Kamba:** Mukumuti; **Luhya:** Shiuna; **Maasai:** Oltakurukuriet, Oltgurguriet; **Swahili:** Mkimwemwe.

DESCRIPTION: A small **twiggy tree** rarely reaching 8 m, with a **relatively dense crown** and a **short thick and often fluted trunk**. The twigs are borne in whorls of 3 and are very hard and stiff. **BARK:** **Pale grey, smooth on young branches. In older parts, flaking in small, fairly thick sections, resulting in a mottled appearance.** **LEAVES:** **Spoon-shaped**, widest and truncated at the tip and borne in whorls of 3, usually less than 5 cm long. **FLOWERS:** Large, borne singly. Corolla large, showy **white, turning yellow after a few days**, then brown before dropping, **tube up to 10 cm long** or more. **FRUIT:** Large, round or oval, grey with prominent longitudinal ribs, remaining on the tree for a long time and falling unopened.

ECOLOGY: A common tree in most of tropical Africa from Ethiopia south to northern Namibia, northern Botswana, Zimbabwe, northern KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland. It occurs on a wide variety of soils, ranging from sand to clay, as well as in rocky areas. In Kenya it is found from the coast to the Lake Victoria basin and also in northern Kenya in open woodland and bushland, often many concentrated in one area. The tree prefers well-drained soils and does not withstand waterlogging. Agroclimatic Zones III–IV. In flower November–December in Nyanza and Western Kenya; fruit and flowers in June in Malindi at the coast.

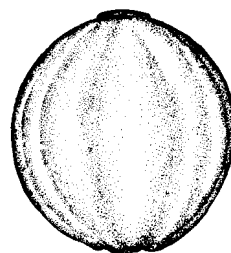
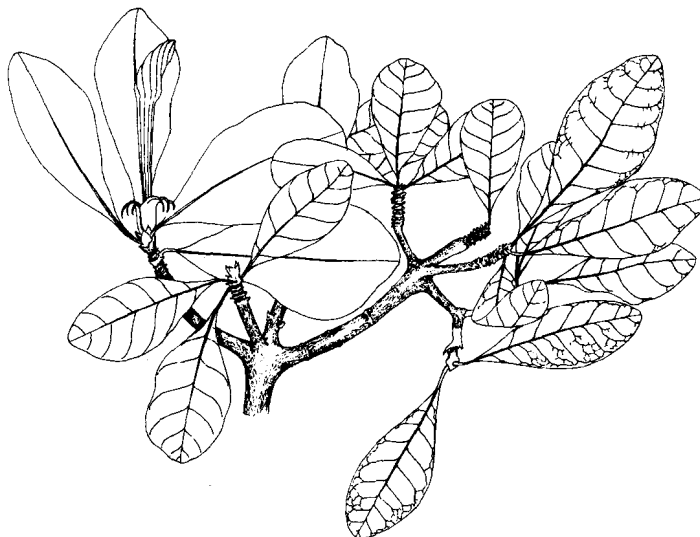
USES: Medicinal, utensils (cooking stirrers, sticks), shade, ornamental, ceremonial.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings.

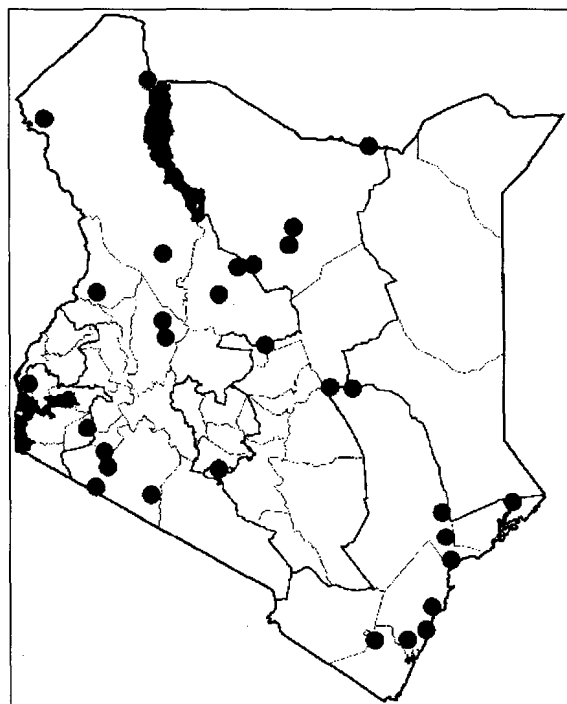
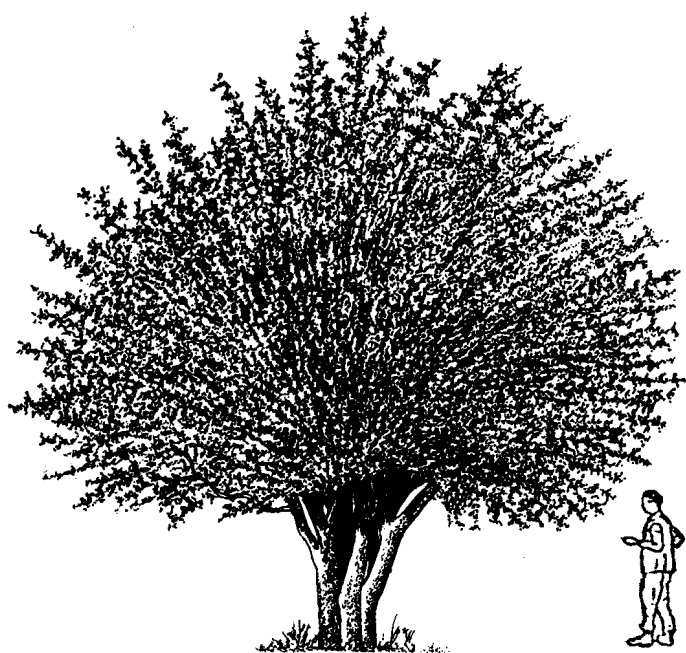
SEED: Seed can remain dormant for a long time.

REMARKS: The showy large flowers of *Gardenia* species make them excellent ornamental plants. The wood of most species is yellowish, very hard, heavy and fine-

grained, but the small size limits its use. Branches of *G. volkensii* are used by Maasai women to close the entrances to animal enclosures. The plant is also used for fencing round cattle enclosures. The hard fruit shell (pericarp) is used as a calabash by children. A related and



Fruit



***Gardenia volkensii* (cont)**

common species is *G. ternifolia* (**Boni:** Kurkoi; **Kamba:** Mukumuti; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Siuna; **Luo:** Rayudhi, Onduongi; **Maasai:** Oltakurukuriet; **Sabaot:** Dabulwa; **Swahili:** Kimwemwe), a slow-growing shrub or tree to 10 m. Leaves are up to 18 cm long, smooth or rough. Flowers white, turning yellow. The fruit is yellow to red, widest in the middle, smooth and up to 7.5 cm long. Normally left in cropland in Bungoma. Its wood is very termite resistant, very hard and very durable. It is used for tool handles, bows and walking sticks, and burning sticks can be used as candles. The bark is commonly used in medicine. The plant is difficult to uproot. Found from the coast to western Kenya, 0–2,100 m. There are 3 other species of *Gardenia* in Kenya. *G. fiorii* (**Somali:** Karro) is more common in dry bushland in north-eastern parts. Leaves are less than 1.5 cm wide, wrinkled and hairy. The other 2 species, *G. posoquerioides* (**Digo:** Chimwemwe) and *G. transvenulosa*, are coastal forest species with a restricted distribution. All are used for medicine.

FURTHER READING: Backes and Ahenda, 1998 (*G. ternifolia*); Beentje, 1994; Blundell, 1987; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; van Wyk, 1993.