Rhus natalensis

Krauss

Anacardiaceae

LOCAL NAMES
Afrikaans (Natal taaibos); Swahili (mvunja kondo,mti shangwe,mkono chuma); Zulu (inhlokoshiyane)

BOTANIC DESCRIPTION
Rhus natalensis is a shrub 2-3 m high or a small tree up to 8 m tall; bark of the branchlets greyish or white and older ones dull grey, lenticillate and rough. Branchlets especially flowering ones densely tomentose.

Leaflets slightly or completely discolourous, entire or undulate-crenate along the margin, papyraceous or subcoriaceous; midrib slightly raised on the upper surface and prominent beneath; lateral nerves slightly raised on both surfaces but more so on the upper surface. Nerve reticulation scarcely or not at all visible. Leaf petiole 1.5-4 cm long, convex below, longitudinally grooved above, glabrous or pubescent; median leaflet obovate, oblong or elliptic, 2.5-9 cm long, 1-3.5 cm broad, obtuse or rounded and sometimes emarginate at the apex.

Panicle inflorescence up to 12 cm long, lax, generally shorter than the leaves, floral axis and branches somewhat pilose; pedicels 1-2 mm long. Calyx segments ovate 0.3-0.5 mm long. Petals oblong, 1-1.5 mm long, whitish or greenish. Staminodes present in female flowers. Disk shallowly 5-lobulate. Ovary subglobose; styles 0.5-0.7 mm long, reflexed; stigmas subcapitate.

Fruit a glabrous drupe, oblong-reniform, 5-6 mm in diameter.

The specific epithet is after Natal Province of South Africa where initial botanical collections of the plant were made.

BIOLOGY
R. natalensis is monoecious.

Tree growing in Masai land Kenya (Bob Bailis)

R. natalensis foliage (Bob Bailis)

Leaflet galls with crater-like ostioles caused by microscopic mites of the Eriophyoidea. (Neser S)

ECOLOGY
R. natalensis is normally found in deciduous and evergreen bushland and woodland, riverine associations, forest edges, often on well drained slopes. Also common in coastal bush, thickets and forest.

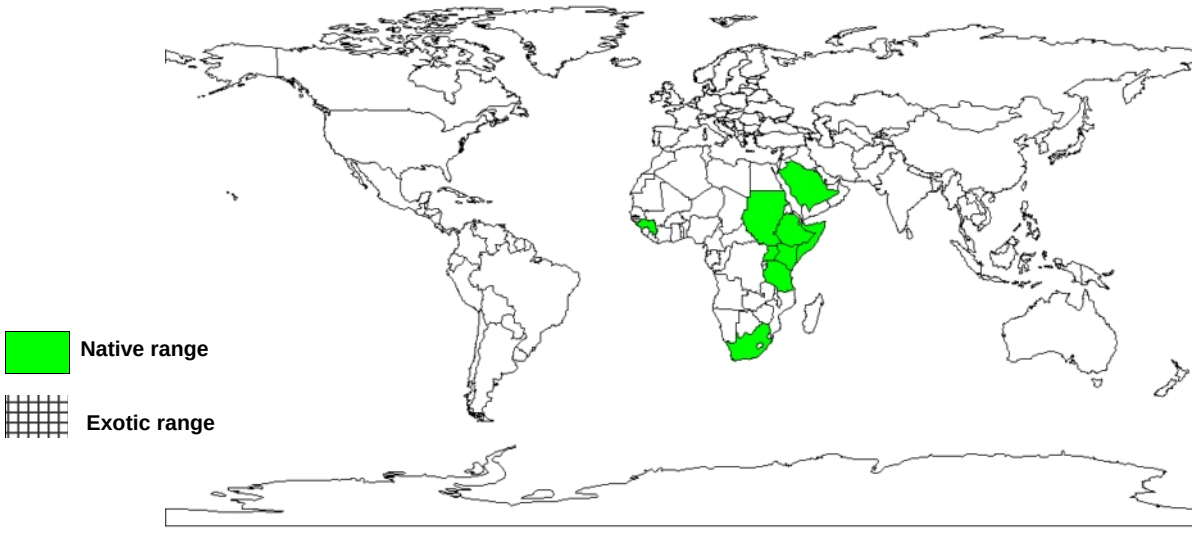
BIOPHYSICAL LIMITS
Altitude: 0-3 000 m
Mean annual rainfall: 1000-1400 mm

Soil type: Prefers clay soils but can grow on various soil types.

DOCUMENTED SPECIES DISTRIBUTION

Native: Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda

Exotic:



The map above shows countries where the species has been planted. It does neither suggest that the species can be planted in every ecological zone within that country, nor that the species can not be planted in other countries than those depicted. Since some tree species are invasive, you need to follow biosafety procedures that apply to your planting site.

PRODUCTS
Food: The sour tasting globose fruits have an edible pulp. The bark is made into tea and the roots are used in preparing soup. Tender leaves and shoots chewed as food.

Fodder: The foliage is eaten by livestock.

Fuel: A provider of good fuelwood and charcoal.

Timber: The wood is used in making household items, agricultural implements and tool handles.

Tannin or dyestuff: The root bark is a source of dye.

Poison: The sap of Rhus spp. is highly irritant and vesicant.

Medicine: The branchlets of this tree are used as toothbrushes. Root decoctions are taken orally to stop diarrhoea. Branch decoctions administered orally for stomach upset. Leaves used in treating coughs and stomachaches. The root decoction also forms part of a medicine for hookworms. The leaf infusion is used in preparing a cough mixture.

SERVICES
Erosion control: R. natalensis helps in soil conservation on slopes.

Shade or shelter: The tree provides cool shade.

Ornamental: R. natalensis is a good garden tree whose fresh foliar growth are a beautiful red in colour.

Boundary or barrier or support: Wood from R. natalensis is used in making fence poles.

In some parts of East Africa the tree is used in ritual treatments for neonates very much like immunisation.

TREE MANAGEMENT
Lower tree branches require pruning.

FURTHER READNG

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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