

Acacia drepanolobium**Fabaceae (Mimosaceae)****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Digo:** Mongololi; **English:** Whistling thorn, Ant-gall acacia, Black-galled acacia; **Kamba:** Kiunga, Iunga (plural); **Kikuyu:** Muruai; **Kipsigis:** Mugurit, Muguruit, Mukuruit; **Luo:** Adugo, Dugna, Dunga, Nduga, Oduga; **Maasai:** Eluai, Eluaai, Erankun, Iluaa (plural); **Mbeere:** Mugambu, Mũgunga; **Pokot:** Sitowonyon, Stoghon, Sloghoonion (plural); **Rendille:** Fulaay; **Samburu:** Luai, Rankau; **Somali:** Fullai; **Swahili:** Mbalibali; **Teso:** Eyelel; **Tugen:** Ngowo; **Turkana:** Eiyellel, Eyelel.

DESCRIPTION: A spiny low bush, shrub or small tree to 6 m high with an open spreading crown, flat-topped at maturity. Most commonly a small shrub 1.5–3.5 m. **BARK:** Grey, usually smooth, older bark finely fissured. **THORNS:** White, straight, some with galls at their base. Galls fleshy, hollow, up to 5 cm in diameter, dark green to reddish purple when fresh, turning dark grey to black and usually inhabited by fierce black or brown ants as they dry. **LEAVES:** Twice-divided into tiny leaflets. **FLOWERS:** Numerous, in white heads. **FRUIT:** A narrow reddish brown pod to 7 cm long, splitting.

ECOLOGY: Grows in eastern and Central Africa, i.e. Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Kenya, very common in Rift Valley and in drier parts of the highlands, e.g. Kaputei Plains, Loita Plains, Kedong Valley, Lambwe Valley, Ndaragwa, Naivasha and Morpus (West Pokot); 750–2,550 m. Most common in open black clay plains, on dry rocky hillsides or in wooded grassland. Often the dominant shrub in plains with black cotton soil at 1,300–2,400 m; less often dominant in red clay soil. Its occurrence often indicates poor drainage. Rainfall: 500–1,300 mm. Agroclimatic Zones III–V. Flowers in October–November in southern Rift Valley.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, food (fresh galls and inner bark edible), medicine (bark), fodder (leaves, pods, young galls and shoots), bee forage, live fence, dead fence (thorny branches), veterinary medicine.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings. Produces root suckers.

SEED: About 21,000 per kg.

treatment: Immerse seed in hot water, allow to cool and soak for 24 hours before sowing to break seed dormancy. **storage:** Seed can be stored for long periods.

REMARKS: A variable species in Kenya. Fresh galls found during active growth, mainly after the rainy season. Locally very common. The soft fleshy galls are edible, having a sweet, often slightly bitter taste, and are a favourite food for herdsmen. The inner bark fibre, which has a sweetish bitter taste, may be chewed (Machakos). A good source of firewood. Leaves, shoots and fresh soft galls are good fodder for goats, camels, cattle and donkeys. Giraffes like browsing on this plant.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Blundell, 1987; Dharani, 2002; ITDG and IIRR, 1996; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Young 1997.

