Acokanthera oppositifolia (*A. longiflora*)

Apocynaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Kamba:** Mukweo, Muvai wa ngo, Ngweo (fruit); **Kikuyu:** Kiruru, Kiururu, Mururu; **Maasai:** Olmorijoi; **Mbeere:** Mururu; **Merú:** Mururu; **Swahili:** Msunguti; **Taita:** Msungusungu, Usungu; **Taveta:** Rumbara.

DESCRIPTION: An evergreen shrub, forest scrambler or small tree, normally 3–5 m high **with white latex and reddish branchlets**. BARK: Grey, rough, deeply fissured in older trees. LEAVES: Opposite, **shiny**, to 13 cm long with a sharp tip, veins conspicuous. FLOWERS: In clusters, made up of 5 parts, with a pink tube and white lobes, sweet smelling. FRUIT: Oval, 2–3.5 cm long, green with purple tinge turning red or purple and fleshy when ripe.

ECOLOGY: Distributed from southern Kenya and Democratic Republic of Congo south to South Africa. In Kenya, for example, in Taita, Kajiado, Kanzalu Range and Kalama (Machakos), Kiambu and around Nairobi. Bushland (especially on rocky hillsides) and riverine forest edges and margins of dry highland forests and forest remnants, usually from 1,000 m (rarely lower) up to 2,400 m. Thrives in rocky soils, red clay and clay-loam with rainfall 600–1,000 mm. Uncommon. Agroclimatic Zone III. Fruits in February–March (Machakos).

USES: Edible fruit (when ripe), shade, ornamental, live fence.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings.

SEED:

treatment: Not required, seeds should be sown fresh.
storage: Seeds have a high natural water content and therefore lose viability if stored.

REMARKS: Usually with fruits and leaves larger than those of *A. schimperi*. Plant roots and other plant parts may be poisonous. Fruit edible, but only when ripe, sweet but rather bitter. Latex from fruit used as chewing gum by children. Its large shiny leaves, numerous pinkish white and fragrant flowers and the purplish red fruits render this species an ideal ornamental.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Dharani, 2002; Kokwaro, 1993; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002.