

Acokanthera schimperi* (A. friesiorum)*Apocynaceae****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Karraru; **English:** Arrow-poison tree; **Gabra:** K'arraaru; **Giriama:** Utungu; **Kamba:** Kivai; **Kikuyu:** Muricu; **Kipsigis:** Keliot, Kelyot; **Maasai:** Olmorijoi; **Meru:** Mururu; **Nandi:** Keliot; **Pokot:** Kolion, Kolyon; **Samburu:** Ilmorijoi; **Somali:** Get mariid; **Tugen:** Kelyon, Kelwon.

DESCRIPTION: An evergreen shrub or small tree to 10 m with a dense rounded crown and a short bole. **BARK:** Dark brown, grooved with age, young twigs flattened. **LEAVES:** Opposite, dark shiny green above, stiff and leathery, oval to rounded, 4–7 cm, the tip pointed and sharp. **FLOWERS:** Appearing with early rains, in dense, fragrant clusters, almost stalkless, white–pink tubular. **FRUIT:** Oval berries to 2 cm, green, turning green–yellow to purple, on ripening the ripe fruit is edible and also eaten by birds and monkeys. Seeds are cream with an ivory appearance, compressed on one side.

ECOLOGY: Widespread in East Africa and south to Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland and north-eastern South Africa. Grows in Kenya in bushland on rocky hillsides, especially on red or black rocky soils, e.g. at Muumandu (Machakos), Ongata-Rongai, Oloosaiyeti Hill (Kajiado), Rumuruti (Laikipia), Loita and Chepelion (north Baringo). Found in dry woodland, thickets and grasslands, often at the margins of dry forest or forest remnants, as at Ngong. Prefers rich well-drained forest soil but also grows on black-cotton soil and poor soils of dry sites, 1,100–2,400 m. Common in dry highland forests and bushed grasslands. Rainfall: 500–900 mm. Agroclimatic Zone III. Fruits in February–March (Machakos).

USES: Spear shafts, edible fruit (when ripe), shade, ornamental, veterinary medicine, arrow poison.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings.

SEED: Seed germination is good but sporadic; 400–450 seeds per kg.

treatment: None.

storage: Seeds have a high natural water content and therefore lose viability if stored.

MANAGEMENT: The growth rate is medium; pruning.

REMARKS: A species more widespread and better known than *A. oppositifolia*. This is the plant used to make arrow poison (Pokot, Kamba, Kipsigis, Embu, Tharaka, Maasai) and by many other communities in Central, eastern and southern Africa. Roots (or other parts of the plant) are boiled in a secluded place for up to 10 hours when the poison is prepared. Ripe fruits are edible. They are sweet with a slightly bitter taste, but should be eaten only when ripe. Otherwise the whole plant is poisonous. Birds have been known to drop dead on sucking nectar from the flowers.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Blundell, 1987; Dharani, 2002; ITDG and IRR, 1996; Katende et al., 1995; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002.

