Balanites aegyptiaca — Balanitaceae

Indigenous

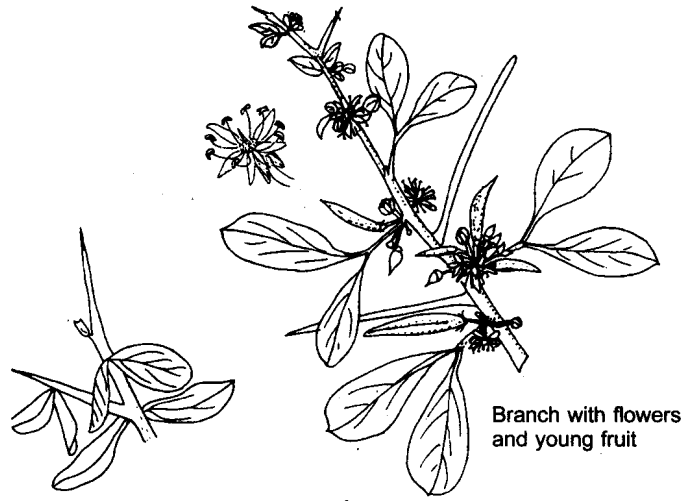
COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Baddan; **Digo:** Mwambangoma; **English:** Desert date; **Gabra:** Baddana; **Giriama:** Mkonga, Konga (fruit); **Ilchamus:** Lowa, Lowei; **Kamba:** Mulului, Ndului (fruit); **Keiyo:** Ng'osonaik, Ng'oswet, Ng'osyet (fruit); **Kipsigis:** Ng'oswet; **Luo:** Othoo; **Maasai:** Ilokwa (fruit), Olng'oswa, Olokwai; **Malakote:** Mubadana; **Marakwet:** Ngoswa; Tuyunwa; **Mbeere:** Mububua; **Orma:** Baddan; **Pokot:** Tuyunwo, Tuyun (plural); **Sabaot:** Chuuandet; **Samburu:** Lowai; **Somali:** Kullan, Kulung (Mandera); **Swahili:** Mjunju, Muchunju; **Taita:** Kiwowa; **Taveta:** Lungoswa; **Teso:** Echomai; **Tharaka:** Muboobua; **Tugen:** Ng'oswo (plant), Ngosyek (fruit), Ngoswa; **Turkana:** Eroronyit.

DESCRIPTION: An evergreen tree to about 10 m, crown rounded with arching branches. BARK: Dark, cracked. THORNS: To 8 cm, soft at first, then woody. LEAVES: Distinctive **pairs of grey-green leaflets,** ovate. FLOWERS: Fragrant, **yellow-green** clusters. FRUIT: Oblong **to 5 cm, both ends round, yellow when ripe,** a hard pointed seed within surrounded by yellow-brown, bittersweet flesh; seed a stone that splits with time.

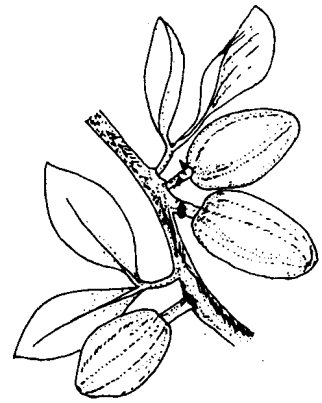
ECOLOGY: An important tree found in Asia and all over Africa from arid and semi-arid regions to subhumid savanna. Found in many parts of Kenya, e.g. in the dry parts of the Lake Basin, Rift Valley and semi-arid parts of Eastern Province. Rare in the coastal zone. Found at 250–2,000 m in bushland and wooded grassland. A common tree in open grassland with black-cotton soil. Prefers valley soils but will grow in sandy, clay, black-cotton, alluvial and stony soils. Rainfall 200–800 mm. Agroclimatic Zones IV–VI. Fresh new leaves in July–August (West Pokot); fruits in March–April (Machakos, Kitui, Kajiado).

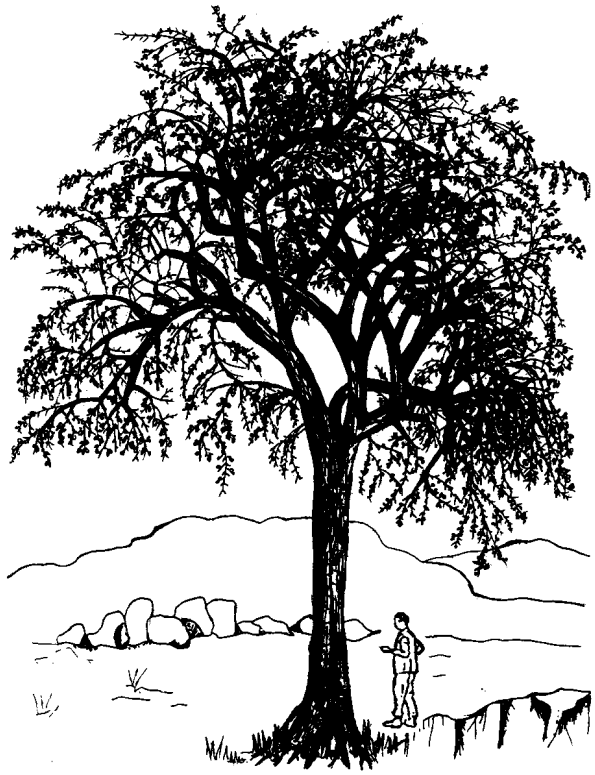
USES: Firewood, charcoal, poles, timber, tool handles, utensils, furniture, edible fruits, vegetable (leaves and young shoots), vegetable oil, edible gum, medicine (roots), fodder (leaves, fruit), bee forage, shade (ceremonial meeting places), mulch, windbreak, resin, gum, live fence; emulsion of fruit kills snails and fish.

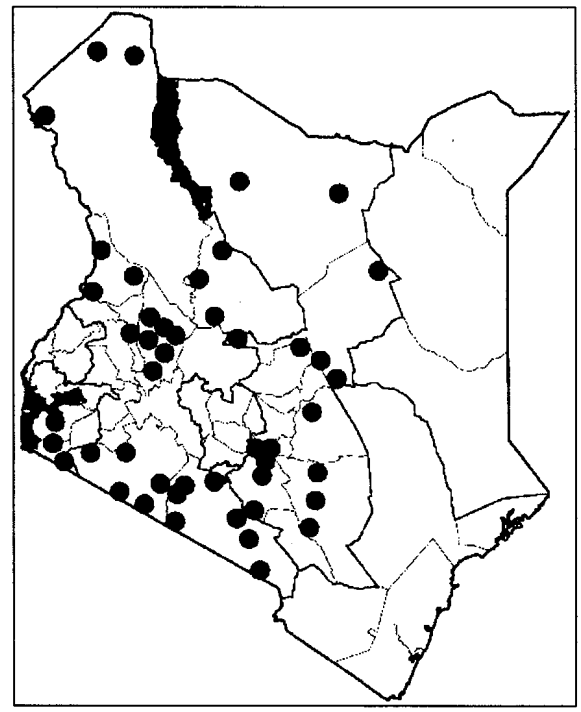
PROPAGATION: Seedlings, direct sowing at site. Produces root suckers if roots are exposed.



Branch with flowers and young fruit







Balanites aegyptiaca (cont)

SEED: Seed large, 4 cm long, 2 cm wide; on average about 1,000 seeds per kg. Seed should be sown vertically with stem end down and completely covered with soil for best results. Germinates in 1–4 weeks.
treatment: Soak seed for 24 hours in cold water, then change water and soak for another 24 hours; alternatively collect seeds that have passed though goats. Can easily be collected where livestock are kept overnight. Germination: 50–70%.
storage: Seed, removed from fruit, can be stored for up to one year. Susceptible to insect attack. Best results from fresh seed.

MANAGEMENT: Slow growing; pruning, lopping, coppicing.

REMARKS: Very important species for dry areas as it produces fruit even in very dry years. Young leaves and tender shoots are used as a vegetable (Pokot, Turkana, Tugen, Marakwet, Keiyo, Ilchamus). Seeds (with shell) or cotyledons (shell removed) are boiled for 2–3 hours and the bean-like cotyledons eaten (Pokot, Tugen, Marakwet). Gum is edible (Maasai). Elsewhere the seeds are a source of oil. Wood hard, durable, termite resistant, worked easily and made into yokes, wooden spoons, pestles, mortars, handles, stools, combs. Resin from stems used to stick feathers onto arrow shafts (Pokot, Turkana) and spearheads onto shafts (Pokot, Maasai, Turkana, Kipsigis), and repair cracks in tool handles, arrows, etc. (Turkana, Pokot). Bark used as fish poison. Elsewhere fruits are used as poison to kill some stages of the bilharzia fluke in water. Even a few are effective. Wood used to make boards for teaching the Koran.

FURTHER READING: http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm; Albrecht, 1993; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Dharani, 2002; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Katende et al., 1995, 1999; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; National Academy of Sciences, 1983; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979; von Maydell, 1990.