

Balanites wilsoniana**Balanitaceae****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Boni:** Kuling; **Digo:** Mkonga; **Giriama:** Mdimu mwitu, Mkonga; **Kamba:** Kivuw'a (Kitui); **Sanya:** Badan; **Swahili:** Mkonga, Mguguni.

DESCRIPTION: A large semi-deciduous forest tree, the trunk generally 6–12 m high (to 30 m in rainforests), girth to 3 m, crooked or fairly straight with **large ascending branches to a spreading crown**, often densely interlocked. The young trunk may have ring-like markings. The tree has conspicuous **long buttresses, continuing upwards as deep twisted fluting**, sometimes with compound thorns in the hollows. **BARK:** Yellow to grey-green or light brown, generally smooth but rough with age; some flaking. Branchlets with forked spines, very hard and sharp, arising above leaf axils and reaching 15 cm in length, **always absent from the flowering branches**. **LEAVES:** 2 leaflets on a common stalk to 2.5 cm, each leaflet stalked to 1 cm, **wide oval, to 8.5 cm x 5 cm**, tip more or less long pointed. New leaf growth bright green. **FLOWERS:** **Yellow-green in stalked clusters**, above a leaf axil, growing from side shoots on older branches. Buds round with 5 sepals, the 5 green petals, 7 mm long, surround a conspicuous central disc of 8–10 stamens. **FRUIT:** A **drupe, green, ripening yellow, 6–10 cm long**, with 5 shallow ribs and an unpleasant smell; the **fibrous coat surrounds the hard inner stone**. The seed kernel is edible and contains oil.

ECOLOGY: Widespread in West Africa from Senegal to Cameroon, eastern Africa and south to Zambia and Botswana. In Kenya, it is found only in the coastal area and in Kibwezi Forest in Makueni District. A typical feature of the coastal evergreen forest and thickets, 0–1,200 m. Agroclimatic Zones II–IV.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, timber (construction), furniture (stools), poles, tool handles, utensils (spoons, mortars), walking sticks, edible fruit, edible oil from seeds, fodder (fruit and leaves), bee forage.

PROPAGATION: Direct sowing at site. Produces root suckers if roots are exposed.

SEED: 50 seeds per kg.

treatment: The flesh is removed before the seeds are sown. No other pretreatment.

storage: Seed can be stored for long periods.

REMARKS: The plant is often infested with caterpillars (*maungu*), which are collected for food by the Giriama. Threatened due to its intensive use for several purposes. Elephants like the fruit and disperse seeds.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Katende et al., 1999; Maundu et al., 1999; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Ruffo et al., 2002.

