

Caesalpinia volkensii

Fabaceae (Caesalpinaceae)

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: Digo: Mburuga; Kamba: Muvuu; Kikuyu: Mubuthi, Mucuthi; Luo: Ajua; Maasai: Olnkulankulei; Meru: Mujuthi; Pokomo: Msadoka; Sanya: Omukbare.

DESCRIPTION: A scrambling shrub or liana usually to 7 m, sometimes more. **STEMS:** Armed with scattered **sharp curved prickles**. **LEAVES:** With prickles, to 8 cm long, twice-divided, pinnae in 3–6 pairs; leaflets in 3–6 pairs, oval, narrowing abruptly towards the tip. **FLOWERS:** Yellow, in terminal spikes. **FRUIT:** **Flat pods almost circular or longer than wide, covered with stiff bristles**, usually to 13 x 6.5 cm with a sharp beak.

ECOLOGY: Distributed only in eastern Africa. Found in evergreen or riverine forest, especially at forest edges. In Kenya, found from the coast to western Kenya, 0–2,100 m. Particularly common in Kitui highlands, Kiambu, Murang'a, Lower Tana and Kwale. Agroclimatic Zones I–III.

USES: Medicine (leaves), live fence, ceremonial (seed), 'bao' game (seed), fodder.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings.

SEED: About 4,000 seeds per kg.

treatment: Nick the seed or immerse in hot water, allow to cool and soak overnight.

storage: Seed can be stored for long periods.

MANAGEMENT: Trim live fence to reduce size or guide branches to attain the desired shape. Can get very bushy and has to be controlled.

REMARKS: Seed used to play the game 'bao' by people at the coast and in the Lake Victoria basin. Some Kamba men and women use the seeds to tell fortunes. *C. trothae* (Boran: Gorgor; Orma: Hamares; Somali: Gora, Furgurgur) is a shrub to 4 m high or a liana. Stems with scattered prickles to 9 mm. Flowers pinkish purple to mauve, one petal with yellow centre. Fruit reddish brown and beaked to 5 x 2 cm. Widely distributed in the eastern and coastal lowland parts of Kenya. Camel fodder. Fruits

reputedly poisonous. Another species, *C. bonduc* (Giriama: M'buruga; Orma: Sadek; Swahili: Mkomwe) is only found along the seashore and in nearby sand dunes. Fruit is densely prickly and up to 8 x 4.5 cm.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Kokwaro, 1993.

