

Combretum molle

Combretaceae

Indigenous

English: Bush willow, velvet-leaved combretum

Nyanja: Kalama, mkute, kakunguni

Senga: Kalama

Ecology: A tree of dry woodlands; very widespread throughout tropical Africa and very variable in habit, 0–2,300 m. It is found all over Zambia but rare in the south and west. Can form pure stands on wooded hillsides and is common in all types of woodlands and in semi-evergreen thicket. Occurs in Eastern Province in all woodland types.

Uses: **Firewood**, charcoal, **timber** (tool handles, construction), **poles**, fence posts, medicine (bark, leaves, roots), fodder (young leaves), dye (roots).

Description: Usually a small tree 5–7 m, up to 13 m; the thin trunk often crooked or leaning, branches heavy, drooping. **BARK:** characteristic in older trunks, **brown-black, deeply grooved into small squares** like “crocodile skin”. **LEAVES:** large and opposite; soft to the touch, more **grey-white hairs below than above, to 17 cm long**, rounded at the base. **FLOWERS:** green-yellow in spikes to 9 cm, sweet heavy scent, before or with new leaves, July–October; the tree conspicuous in flower. **FRUIT:** dry **4-winged seeds**, to 2 cm, yellow-green becoming a bright **golden brown**; June–September.

Propagation: Seedlings, rootsuckers.

Seed: No. of seeds per kg: 10,000–15,000. Germinates easily if fresh.

treatment: Remove seed wings before sowing.

storage: Can be stored for a few weeks; sow fresh seeds for best results.

Management: Lopping, coppicing.

Remarks: The timber is hard and pale yellow, reasonably termite-proof. The seed germinates easily and the tree grows relatively fast initially. Roots can be used for treating hookworm, snakebite, stomach pains, fever, dysentery and leprosy. A concoction of roots is used to treat abdominal pains and sterility.

