

Commiphora africana

Burseraceae

Indigenous

Nyanja: Mchovwe, chitontho

Senga: Chitontho

Tumbuka: Chitontho

Ecology: A shrub found all over Africa in the driest areas. It will grow on sandy plains, clay soils to rocky slopes with minimal rainfall. In Zambia, it is widespread at low to medium altitudes in dry areas, e.g. Luangwa Valley.

Uses: Food (fruit), medicine (roots, bark, fruit), **fodder** (goats eat shoots), **live fence**.

Description: A deciduous, **thorny shrub** or tree to 5 m, **bare for many months**. **BARK:** grey-green peeling to show green below; when cut a yellowish gum drips out, **branchlets thorn-tipped**. **LEAVES:** soft, **hairy**, compound, **3 leaflets**, **the central leaflet largest**. **FLOWERS:** small, often clustered on the thorns, green to red. **FRUIT:** soft and pointed, **pink-red**, to **1 cm**, containing 1 hard seed.

Propagation: Large cuttings.

Seed: No. of seeds/kg 8,000.

treatment: –

storage: –

Management: Lopping. Slow growing.

Remarks: Leaves contain bitter tannin, so they are not browsed by cattle or wild game, but important fodder for goats. The leaves contain 8–14% crude protein. Widely used as a live fence for gardens. It does not compete with crops. Fruits are used for the treatment of typhoid fever and stomach problems. The powdered bark mixed with porridge is used to cure malaria. Burnt resin fumes are used as an insecticide. An edible oil can also be extracted from the seed.

