

***Commiphora myrrha* (C. coriacea)**

Burseraaceae

Indigenous**STANDARD/TRADE NAME:** Myrrh.**COMMON NAMES:** **Boran:** Khumbi, Kumbi; **English:** Gum myrrh tree; **Somali:** Malmal.

DESCRIPTION: A spiny shrub or small tree to 5 m high, with a distinct short **stout irregular angled trunk**. **BARK:** Silvery, yellowish or bluish, peeling in papery flakes to reveal the green underbark, **exuding a scented translucent yellowish gum**. **LEAVES:** **Grey-green, very variable**, leaflets very small (6 mm) or large (4 cm). Leaves compound, but lateral leaflets occasionally absent, edge almost entire, toothed or with 3 lobes. **FLOWERS:** Greenish yellow, **2–4 together**. **FRUIT:** **Oval to 1.2 cm long, flat**.

ECOLOGY: Found in Kenya, eastern Ethiopia, Somalia and the Arabian Peninsula. In Kenya, restricted to the north-eastern part (mainly in Mandera and Wajir Districts). Found in gentle to rolling landscapes with *Acacia-Commiphora* open bushland on shallow, gravelly or sandy soils, usually over limestone, 220–800 m. Tolerates salinity. Rainfall: 230–300 mm. Agroclimatic Zones VI–VII.

USES: Firewood, utensils (containers, headrests), edible seed, medicine (resin), fodder, shade, resin, live fence, perfume (resin), ink (resin), veterinary medicine.

PROPAGATION: Propagated vegetatively by stem cuttings.

MANAGEMENT: Pollarding.

REMARKS: The main source of the commercially valuable resin myrrh. The resin is also used to treat snakebite, as an eye ointment, and as a local ink ingredient. Whenever ink is required water is simply added to the resin to make it ready for use. The ink is not easy to erase and can last a long time. The seed is edible. This is one of the most valued plants in rural areas in Mandera and generally in northern Kenya. Important income is generated from sale of myrrh in addition to all the important local uses. Myrrh is greatly valued as traditional medicine in Muslim and Hindu cultures as well as in the Far East.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; ITDG and IIRR, 1996.

