

Cyphomandra betacea

Solanaceae

Peru, South America**COMMON NAMES:** English: Tree tomato.

DESCRIPTION: A large evergreen shrub to 3 m with **characteristic umbrella-like branching**. **BARK:** Young stems are shiny, old stems with rounded leaf scars. **LEAVES:** Alternate, large, rather **heart-shaped, 40 x 30 cm, softly hairy**, drooping in heat, on a long stalk. **FLOWERS:** In fragrant hanging groups from older stems. **Each flower 5-lobed, white-pink** with a darker stripe. **FRUIT:** In clusters, **egg-shaped to 7 cm long**, abundant, on long stems, **shiny orange-red to purple**.

ECOLOGY: A woody shrub from Peru. A long time ago introduced to many tropical areas where it is sometimes naturalized. In Kenya, 1,000–1,800 m. It does best on deep soils, bearing fruit in about 2 years and remaining productive for several years. Does not tolerate waterlogging. Requires good rainfall, 1,200–2,100 mm. Agroclimatic Zones I–III.

USES: Edible fruit (vegetable, jam), bee forage.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, cuttings, wildings. Use of cuttings from mother plants with good fruit ensures that a good type is propagated. Cuttings of 1–2-year-old wood, 10–30 mm thick and 45–100 cm long can be defoliated and planted directly in the field. Cuttings may give low-branched, bushy trees on which flowers may need to be removed to promote growth in the first year.

SEED: 90,000–180,000 seeds per kg. Separate seed from fruit pulp, clean and dry in the shade.

treatment: Not required, although freezing may improve germination.

storage: Stores well.

MANAGEMENT: Fast growing. Pruning. Shallow root system, so deep cultivation should be avoided near the tree. Mulch is beneficial.

REMARKS: The fruit is slower to ripen at higher altitudes. The acid fruit can be eaten raw or cooked, the quality depending on the variety grown. Large-scale commercial

production and organized marketing occurs in New Zealand, but international trade in the fruit and preserves remains small. No named cultivars exist. Red fruits are often chosen for fresh fruit markets because they look attractive, but they have a stronger, more acid flavour than yellow ones. Yellow fruit can be canned, but the juice of the red fruit is too abrasive.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Katende et al., 1995, 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Verheij and Coronel, 1993.

