

***Dialium orientale*****Indigenous**

**Standard/Trade name:** Mpepeta.

**COMMON NAMES:** **Boni:** Sheshubla, Shishobli; **Chonyi:** Mtumbwi, Mutumbwi; **Giriama:** Mtumbwi, Mutumbwi; **Kambe:** Mtumbwi, Mutumbwi; **Sanya:** Shoshobli, Shusholwe; **Somali:** Frim; **Swahili:** Mpepeta.

**DESCRIPTION:** A spreading, often multi-stemmed, shrub or small tree usually to about 5 m, rarely to 15 m. Branches drooping, occasionally touching the ground. **BARK:** Smooth, pale grey–white–pink. **LEAVES:** Compound, odd pinnate with 7–9 small leaflets, oval, base wide to rounded, 1.5–5 cm long, midrib hairy, tips rounded to obtuse, not drawn out, on a stalk to 5 cm long (much smaller than in *D. holtzii*). **FLOWERS:** Small, green–cream–yellow in large dense heads to 30 cm x 20 cm. **FRUIT:** Red-brown more or less round pods to 1.8 cm long with a thin dry brittle shell enclosing a dry red-brown pulp. Seeds 1 or 2, grey-brown, smooth, shiny, enclosed in a thin soft membrane.

**ECOLOGY:** Endemic along the East African coast from southern Somalia to north-eastern Tanzania. In Kenya, only in the coastal area (Kilifi, Tana River and Lamu), in dry coastal forest, in *Brachystegia*, *Azelia*, *Manilkara* woodland, and in coastal riverine vegetation, 0–100 m. Sandy or alluvial soils. Agroclimatic Zones I–III. Fruits in March–April.

**USES:** Firewood, charcoal, poles, tool handles, utensils (grain mortars), boat building (dhow ribs), edible fruit pulp, drink (juice from the fruit), flavouring (fruit pulp).

**PROPAGATION:** Seedlings, direct sowing at site.

**SEED:** About 800 seeds per kg.

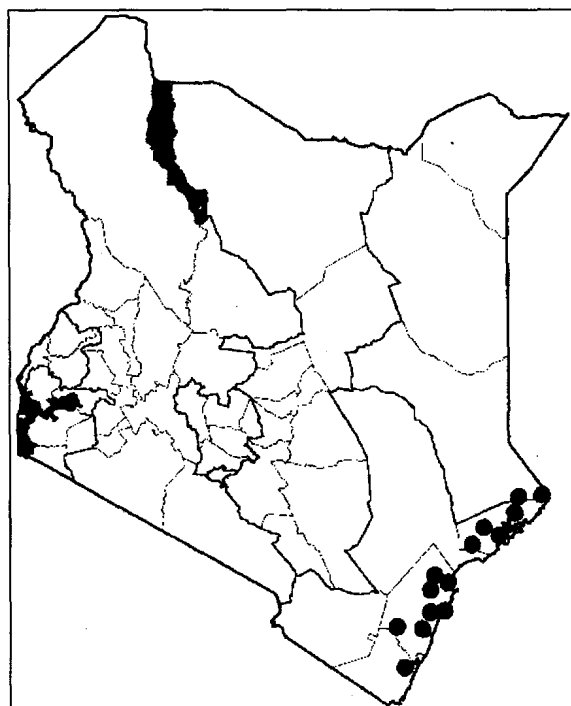
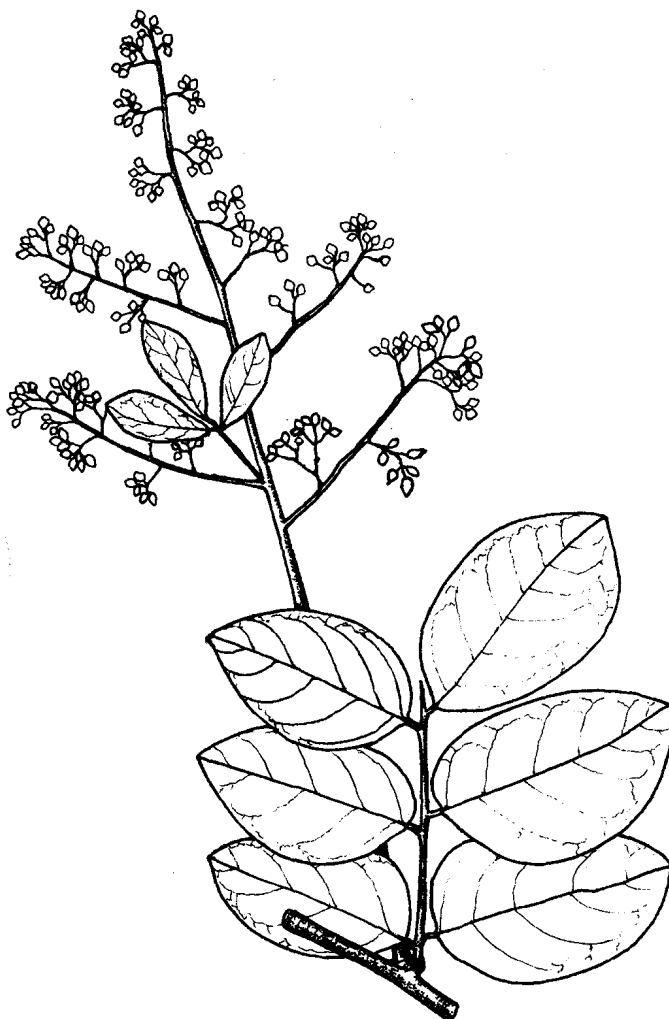
**treatment:** Immerse in hot water, allow to cool and soak for 24 hours.

**MANAGEMENT:** Slow growing.

**REMARKS:** Fruit eaten raw. The brittle outer shell is easily detached by cracking it open. The sweet–acid pulp is sucked (the membrane covering the seed is eaten too) and the seed discarded. Good as a snack. The fruit pulp is used for flavouring porridge and local beer, and may also be made into a juice. Fruit sold in Malindi town. May be locally common in the Coast Province. Fruit and seeds

**Fabaceae (Caesalpinaceae)**

may keep for several years. A related but less common species, *D. holtzii* (**Giriama:** Mtumbwi; **Swahili:** Mpepeta, Mpekechu), is also found at the coast. It is a multi-stemmed shrub or tree to 20 m. Crown with a



## *Dialium orientale* (cont)

medium spread, trunk occasionally slightly buttressed. Fruit resemble those of *D. orientale*. It grows along the East African coast from Kenya through Tanzania to Mozambique. In Kenya only in the coastal region, especially towards the Tanzanian border, in moist lowland forest, 0–100 m in coastal sandy limestone soils. Agroclimatic Zones I–III. Like its relative, the dry pulp is edible and has a sweet–acid taste. The wood is used in construction and as fuelwood.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Maundu et al., 1999; Ruffo et al., 2002.

