

Dichrostachys cinerea

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Boni:** Msativu, Msingoni; **Boran:** Jirime; **Giriana:** Muchinjiri; **Kamba:** Muvilisya; **Kikuyu:** Rutie; **Kipsigis:** Katet; **Luo:** Okiri; **Maasai:** Olmerumuri; **Pokot:** Tiyin, Tiin; **Samburu:** Legili; **Sanya:** Mkingili; **Somali:** Ditar; **Taita:** Dunggu; **Tugen:** Tinet; **Turkana:** Etirak.

DESCRIPTION: A shrub or a small tree to 8 m high with a light crown and flexible branches with lateral leafy twigs that terminate in a spine. **BARK:** Grey-white, rough. **LEAVES:** Compound, twice-divided, with few to numerous pairs of pinnae and glands along the stalk where leaflets attach. Leaflets numerous, narrow or oblong, up to 4 x 11 mm. **FLOWERS:** Borne on a long spike arising from leaf axils. **Spike 2-coloured, yellow towards the apex (fertile part) and mauve, pink or white towards the base (sterile part),** hanging, so that the yellow part is lowest. Stalk up to 9 cm, usually much shorter. **FRUIT:** Black, up to 10 cm long but much twisted into spirals. Pods rot on the ground to release about 4 seeds.

ECOLOGY: A species widely distributed in tropical Africa with numerous subspecies. In Kenya it is found in most dry parts of the country, occasionally extending to the wet but warm regions. It is found in bushland, wooded grassland and in thickets, the latter sometimes formed of this shrub. Agroclimatic Zones II–VI. In flower in November–December in Nyanza.

USES: Firewood, spearshafts, tool handles, fodder (goats, camels), bee forage, live fence, dry fence, ornamental, nitrogen-fixing, soil conservation.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings, direct sowing at site, root suckers.

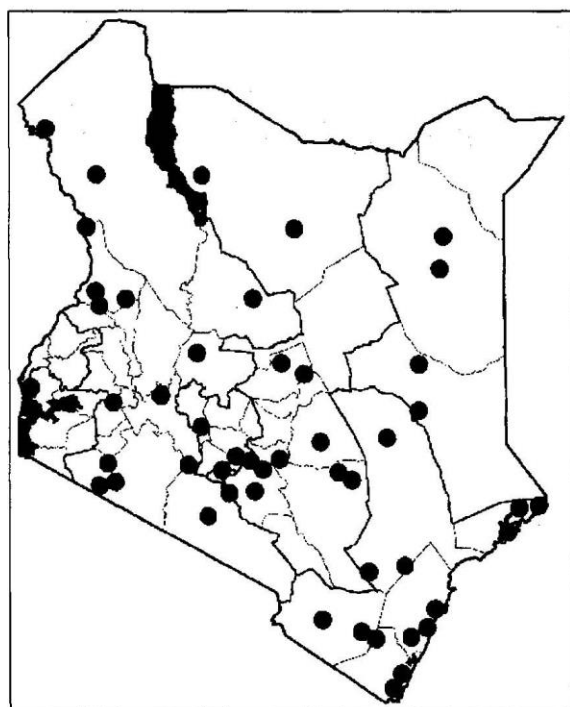
SEED: The tree seeds prolifically when in open land.

Germination is very good and fast after pretreatment.

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

storage: Can be stored for several years at room temperature if kept dry and free from insects. Add ash to reduce insect damage.

MANAGEMENT: Prune all lower branches, and preferably all spiny tips to avoid accidents if trees grow near the home. Slow growing; coppicing, lopping, pollarding.



Dichrostachys cinerea (cont)

REMARKS: This species probably has the most beautiful flower in the family and therefore great potential as an ornamental. However, the spines are poisonous if they pierce the skin and should be avoided. The bush is a great bother to farmers due to its spiny nature, but the pods are appreciated as nutritious fodder for livestock in dry areas. *D. cinerea* is a very variable species with numerous subspecies and varieties. At least 5 subspecies are currently recognized: subsp. *africana* with 7–19 pairs of pinnae in the larger leaves is the most common of all, being found in most dry parts of the country in bushland and thickets, 0–1,700 m; subsp. *forbesii* with 4–8 pairs of

pinnae is coastal in distribution being found in evergreen coastal bushland; subsp. *keniensis* with 8–12 pinnae in the larger leaves is common in the north coast; subsp. *wajirensis* with 2–3 or sometimes 4 pairs of pinnae is endemic to northern Kenya in *Acacia–Delonix* bushland; subsp. *nyassana* with 6–11 pairs of pinnae in the larger leaves is found in central Kenya and north-westwards to Turkana District.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Katende et al., 1995; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002.