

Diospyros abyssinica

Ebenaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: Boran: Roho; **English:** Abyssinian diospyros; **Gabra:** Lookko; **Giriama:** Mlala; **Ilchamus:** Moty mowgi; **Kamba:** Mukololo; **Kikuyu:** Muiruthi; **Kipsigis:** Cheptuiyet; **Luhya:** Lusui; **Luo:** Ochol; **Maasai:** Olchartuyan, Olchartuyan orok, Oljatuyan; **Meru:** Mutharagwe, Mutimwiro; **Nandi:** Cheptuiyet, Kenduiwet; **Sabaot:** Cheptua; **Samburu:** Ichanai orok; **Swahili:** Mdaa mwitu; **Taveta:** Msesevu.

DESCRIPTION: A tall evergreen tree with a straight, slender trunk about 20 m, but reaching 40 m in forests. It has a **small mushroom-shaped crown**. **BARK:** Dark grey-brown, turning black, thick and fibrous, scaling off in thin strips or cracking into small rectangles. **LEAVES:** Shiny dark green, long oval to 16 cm, narrowing to the tip, the **edge wavy, midrib clear below**. The short stalk is grooved. **Dry black leaves** can be seen below a tree. **FLOWERS:** Small, white and fragrant, in clusters beside the leaves. **FRUIT:** Held in a **cup-shaped calyx**, round or slightly elongate, to 1.5 cm long, **tip pointed** due to a persistent style, **red-yellow then black** when ripe. Sometimes in dense clusters.

ECOLOGY: A widespread African forest tree found in West Africa as well as eastern Africa, generally in rainforest, lower montane forests, especially on drier sites and upper slopes, often on shallow soils underlain by murram. In Kenya it occurs in coastal forests 0–300 m, and also inland around Nairobi and most of western Kenya in dry highland and riverine forests, up to 2,200 m. Sometimes the dominant forest species, e.g. in the areas around the Mara River. Agroclimatic Zones II–III.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, timber (local construction), furniture, poles (low quality), tool handles, walking sticks, farm implements, shade.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings.

SEED: About 2,500–3,000 seeds per kg.

treatment: Not necessary.

storage: Seed can be stored for long periods. Add ash to reduce insect damage.

MANAGEMENT: Generally slow growing in natural habitats; pruning, pollarding, coppicing.

REMARKS: The wood is pale, hard and tough, difficult to plane and not durable. The heartwood is darker. Though a mixed-forest species, it grows fast when planted in new areas and in farmland, thus quickly yielding good firewood and low-quality building poles. At least 14 other *Diospyros* species are known in Kenya. They are mainly dioecious (male and female flowering parts on separate individual plants) shrubs or, more often, trees.



They are known for their tough wood. The majority are coastal dryland species.

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

