

***Dombeya torrida* (*D. goetzenii*)****Sterculiaceae****Indigenous**

**COMMON NAMES:** **Keiyo:** Boloet; **Kikuyu:** Mukeu; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumukusa; **Marakwet:** Borowa; **Maasai:** Olsbukiai orok, Olsburiiiai; **Meru:** Monde, Mukeu; **Nandi:** Sibukuet, Silipchet; **Ogiek:** Silibuet; **Tugen:** Boroa, Borowa; **Turkana:** Apongat.

**DESCRIPTION:** A deciduous shrub or much-branched tree, 12–15 m, with a shady umbrella crown and a trunk diameter of about 50 cm. **BARK:** Grey and smooth, only lightly grooved with age; clear breathing pores (lenticels); inner bark thick, orange-brown, very fibrous. **LEAVES:** Large, hairy and heart-shaped, the leaf bases overlapping, to 30 cm long, tip pointed, edge sharply toothed, vein network very clear below with 5 or more veins radiating from the centre. **Young stems and leaf stalks often red.** **FLOWERS:** Often abundant, pale pink or white with red centres, full of nectar, in showy clusters on branched hairy stalks to 30 cm, 5 petals one-sided, red-purple in centre; many stamens with orange anthers; 5 pink stigmas. **FRUIT:** Petals turn yellow-brown and surround the fruit capsule, oval, densely hairy, with about 10 brown seeds inside.

**ECOLOGY:** An understorey timber tree of wetter highland forests of eastern Africa and Ethiopia. Associated with *Hagenia*, *Cassipourea* and *Cornus* on highland mountains. It can also form a part of mixed montane *Podocarpus* forests. In Kenya, the tree is mainly found in the Aberdares, Cherangani Hills, Elgeyo-Marakwet escarpment, on Mt Kenya, Mt Elgon and in the Mau forest; 1,850–2,700 m, more common above 2,200 m. Also riverine. Agroclimatic Zones I–III.

**USES:** Firewood, charcoal, timber, poles, tool handles, bows, medicine (bark and roots), bee forage, shade, mulch, soil improvement (nursery-soil collection), fibre (from bark for ropes).

**PROPAGATION:** Seedlings, wildings.

**SEED:** About 235,000 seeds per kg. Under good conditions the seed will germinate in 15–20 days. After drying the capsules in the sun for 2–3 days, the seed can be separated from the dried capsules by rubbing or by threshing the capsules lightly in a bag. The latter method is recom-

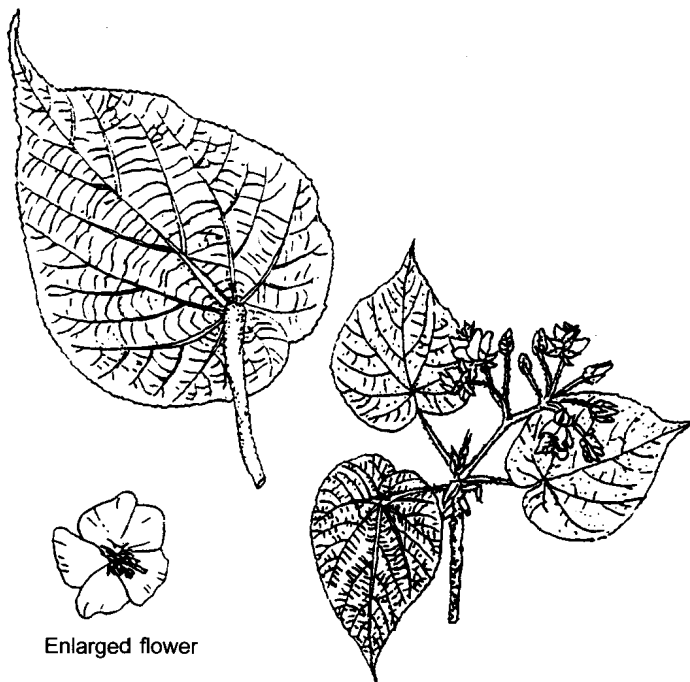
mended because the fine hairs of the fruit may cause eye irritation.

**treatment:** Not necessary.

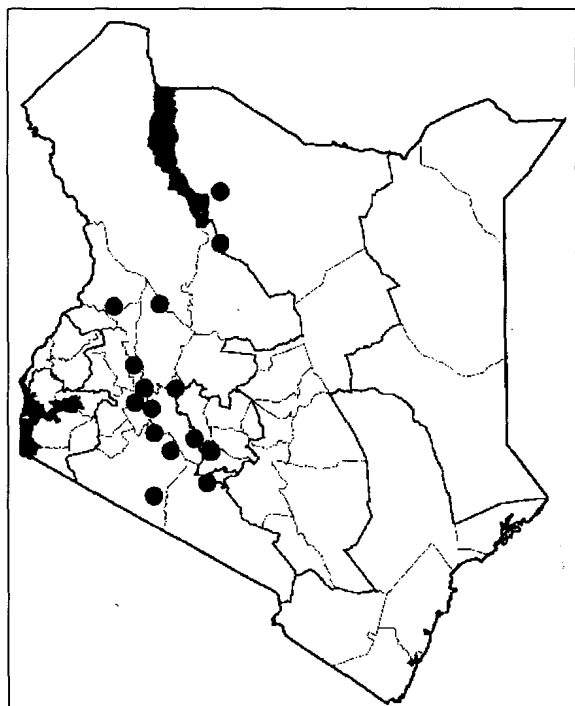
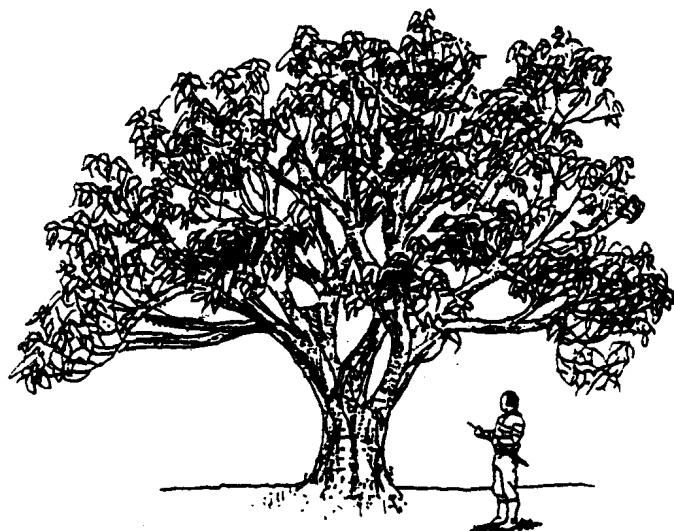
**storage:** Seed can be stored in airtight containers.

**MANAGEMENT:** Fairly fast growing; pruning.

**REMARKS:** Of the 6 or so *Dombeya* species occurring in Kenya, this is the largest. It is an important timber tree. The wood is soft but tough, easy to saw and to plane. Nailing does not cause splitting. It is, however, not durable in the ground. Even though top-quality forest soil can be obtained below these trees, food crops do not grow well nearby since the tree has both a heavy shading effect and heavy litter fall that make it difficult for other plants to grow.



Enlarged flower



## ***Dombeya torrida* (cont)**

Another common highland species is *D. burgessiae* (**Kamba:** Muvau; **Kikuyu:** Mukeu; **Kipsigis:** Silibwet; **Kuria:** Omongusu; **Luhya:** Mukusa; **Luo:** Owich; **Maasai:** Osupukiai orok; **Meru:** Monde, Mukeu; **Nandi:** Kilipchet; **Samburu:** Ilporowai; **Turkana:** Epongoi, Apongat). It is an undershrub, to 5 m tall, very wide-spread in upland forest edges. Leaves are heart-shaped, occasionally 3-lobed, hairy above and below. It is found in most of upland Kenya in open forests, riverine vegetation and in bushland, especially in rocky places. The roots have medicinal uses and the flowers, which hang on long stalks, also attract bees. The bark of stems provides good strong fibre.

**FURTHER READING:** Albrecht, 1993; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Blundell, 1987; Dharani, 2002; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Katende et al., 1995; Kokwaro, 1993; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990.