

Erythrina abyssinica

Fabaceae (Papilionaceae)

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Duruma:** Mgalla; **English:** Abyssinian coral tree, Red-hot-poker tree; **Kamba:** Muvuti; **Kikuyu:** Muhuti; **Kipsigis:** Kogoru; **Kisii:** Omotembe; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumurembe, Omotembe, Omurembe; **Luo:** Murembe, Mrembe, Orembe; **Maasai:** Olepangi, Oloponi, Enkoponi; **Meru:** Muuti; **Nandi:** Kakaru; **Kagaruet:** Pokot: Karkar (plural), Korkorwo; **Sabaot:** Kaborte; **Samburu:** Garacha; **Swahili:** Mbambangoma, Mwambangoma; **Taita:** Mulungu.

DESCRIPTION: A deciduous tree with a short trunk, thick spreading branches and a rounded crown, 6–12 m. **BARK:** Deeply grooved, brown, thick and corky, with or without woody spines. **LEAVES:** Compound with 3 leaflets, **largest leaflet rounded to 15 cm**; branchlets and underside of leaves covered with **grey-brown hairs, veins and stalks sometimes prickly**. **FLOWERS:** **Orange-red heads**, often appearing on the bare tree. Both narrow calyx lobes and petals are coloured, each flower to 5 cm long. **FRUIT:** Woody pods, 4–16 cm long, hairy, strongly narrowed between seeds, opening to set free 1–10 **shiny red seeds** with a grey-black patch.

ECOLOGY: A small thorny tree found all over Africa in warm temperate and tropical areas, as well as in Central America, Australia, southern Asia and Hawaii. Found in many parts of Kenya in open woodland or grassland, but not in very dry or high-altitude areas. Distributed in the coastal hills, 300–450 m and in inland areas, 900–2,250 m. Agroclimatic Zones II–V. Flowers in January–March and seeds in June–July in Trans Nzoia and Uasin Gishu Districts and in Western and Nyanza Provinces.

USES: Firewood, timber (doors), furniture (stools), beehives, carving, utensils (mortars, drums), medicine (bark and roots), bee forage, ornamental, mulch, nitrogen-fixing, soil conservation, veterinary medicine, ceremonial, necklaces and curios (from seeds).

PROPAGATION: Seedlings. May also grow from cuttings, but raising seedlings is easy.

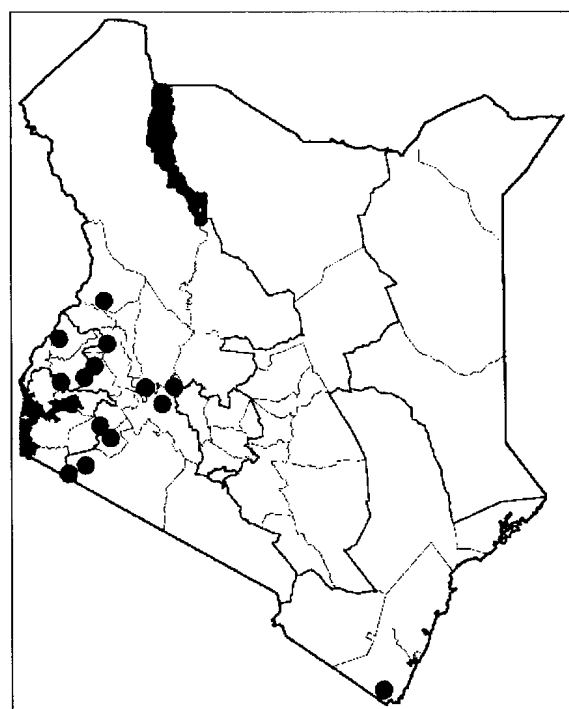
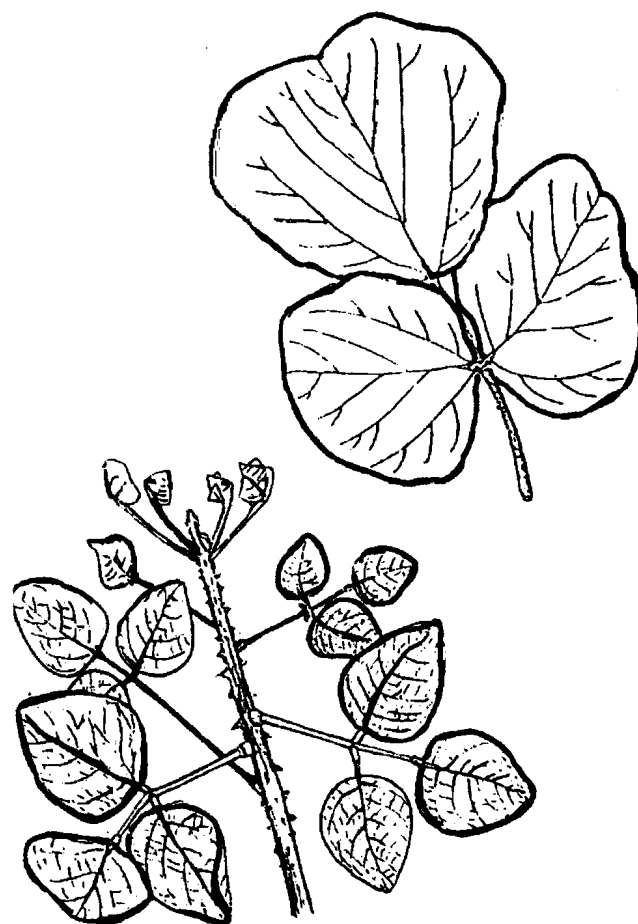
SEED: Low germination rate (10–30%), but it is easy to collect seed; 6,500–6,800 seeds per kg.

treatment: Not necessary, but nicking may improve germination.

storage: Seed can be stored for long periods.

MANAGEMENT: Slow growing; pollarding.

REMARKS: In the Luo community the tree is associated with evil spirits and therefore not planted in homesteads or left in farmland. The seeds are said to be poisonous. It tolerates fire and is fairly termite resistant. The genus *Erythrina* is easily distinguished by the 3 leaflets, spiny stems and leaves and bright red or orange flowers, which



***Erythrina abyssinica* (cont)**

are mainly bird pollinated. A number are Asian and African, but the majority are found in the Americas. Of the 5 species of *Erythrina* occurring in the wild in Kenya, *E. abyssinica* is the most widely distributed and well covered in the literature. At the other extreme, *E. excelsa* (Luo: Yuma, Yuoma, Roko) is known only from Kisii and Migori Districts. *E. saculeuxii* (Bajun: Mbembakoshi, Buruu; Boni: Vugu; Duruma: Mgala; Giriama: Mulungu; Swahili: Mbambangoma, Mdundungoma) is restricted to the coastal zone. Like the other members of the genus it can be a large deciduous tree to 20 m high. The bark is smooth but ridged and covered with corky bosses with a spine at the tip.

Branches are spiny. Leaflets are large, to 20 cm long, and almost as long as wide, softly hairy when young but hairless at maturity. Flowers are red, in dense heads, and the fruit is much constricted between the seeds. Found at the coast, but often grown as an ornamental. The trunk is used for making drums.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Blundell, 1987; Dharani, 2002; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; ITDG and IIRR, 1996; Katende et al., 1995; Kokwaro, 1993; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990; Storrs, 1979.

