

*Erythrina melanacantha***Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Walena, Walensu; **Embu:** Mukunguu; **Gabra:** Waleena; **Ilchamus:** Nyala za sibha; **Kikuyu:** Mukunguu; **Meru:** Mukunguu; **Orma:** Woies; **Pokomo:** Kitweo; **Samburu:** Mnorotshi; **Somali:** Bura; **Wardei:** Bura.

DESCRIPTION: A much-branched deciduous tree to 12 m high. **BARK:** Thick with large **spine-tipped bosses**. Branches armed with black prickles. **LEAVES:** Compound with 3 leaflets, the terminal leaflet the largest. Leaflets **up to 9 x 12 cm**, rounded or widest at the middle or beyond the middle towards the tip, which may be rounded or slightly notched. **Undersides of the leaves covered with soft hairs.** **FLOWERS:** Bright red, in erect heads about 25 cm long, appearing when the tree is almost leafless. **FRUIT:** A **curved pod** without constrictions, **up to 30 cm** long, slightly winged on the lower side, with a few bean-like seeds.

ECOLOGY: This species is found mainly in the semi-arid lands of northern and eastern Kenya; often in *Acacia-Commiphora* bushland or *Acacia-Combretum* bush or woodland and often near luggas; 300–1,300 m. It is planted in farmland along rivers. Common over 600 m in northern Kenya and often in loamy sediment soils. Agroclimatic Zones V–VI.

USES: Furniture (stools), utensils (containers, headrests, etc.), fodder, shade, ornamental, nitrogen-fixing.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings.

MANAGEMENT: Pollarding.

REMARKS: *Erythrina melanacantha* is restricted to drier areas and can easily be recognized by its large size and often flat top. It is highly valued for its soft and multipurpose wood, which is carved into utensils and stools. It is one of the most valuable plants in Mandera District. The wood is used for making milk and water containers, local chairs and all utensils that the nomads require. The Pokot

Fabaceae (Papilionaceae)

make headrests of this wood. Holes in the tree retain water for many years, which is used in very dry seasons by pastoralists. It often grows at a lower altitude and in drier climates than *E. burtii*. Bura town is said to have been named after the Somali name for this tree.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994.

