

## *Grevillea robusta*

## Proteaceae

### Eastern Australia

**COMMON NAMES:** **English:** Silky oak; **Kamba:** Mukima; **Kikuyu:** Mubariti, Mukima; **Kisii:** Omokabiria; **Luhya:** Eshichuma, Wakhuisi; **Nandi:** Kapkawet.

**DESCRIPTION:** A semi-deciduous tree to 20 m or more with a straight trunk, angular branches and an oval leafy crown. **BARK:** Dark grey, rough, vertically grooved. **LEAVES:** Compound, fern-like, very divided, leathery, pale green above, silver-grey below. **FLOWERS:** Very many, in one-sided golden-orange spikes, much nectar, which attracts bees and sunbirds. **FRUIT:** Dark brown capsule, about 1 cm, with a slender beak, splitting to set free 2 winged seeds.

**ECOLOGY:** A very successful Australian tree planted and widely used in Africa, 0–3,000 m. It was introduced to Kenya as coffee shade but has been found to have a variety of uses. It grows well on neutral to acidic loam or light sandy soils but is not tolerant to waterlogging or heavy clays. Agroclimatic Zones II–V.

**USES:** Firewood, charcoal, timber, furniture, poles, veneer, fodder (leaves, low quality), bee forage, shade, ornamental, mulch, soil conservation, windbreak.

**PROPAGATION:** Wildings, seedlings.

**SEED:** Germination rate 30–90% in 2–3 weeks; 70,000–113,000 seeds per kg, average in Kenya around 83,000. Collection of large amounts of seed is time consuming. Each capsule contains only 2 seeds that are dispersed by wind soon after the capsule splits open. Capsules can be collected just before they split and kept for drying, splitting and extraction of seeds. Collection of green capsules should be avoided as immature seeds germinate poorly. Seedlings may attain 75 cm within the first year.

**treatment:** Not necessary.

**storage:** Seed can be stored for up to 3 months, but the storage period can be extended if they are refrigerated. However, it is better to avoid storage altogether.

**MANAGEMENT:** Moderate to fast growing; pollarding, lopping, coppicing and pruning. Only young trees coppice well.

**REMARKS:** In some communities, there is a cultural belief that the species attracts lightning in homesteads. An important dry-season fodder in Meru District, the tree grows well with food crops if managed to reduce shade. The timber is hard and has an attractive grain. *Grevillea* is an extremely important tree in the Kenya highlands and has become an integral part of the farming system in many areas. Pollarded branches are meeting much of the firewood needs, stems are used for timber, and the leaf litter is used as bedding material in livestock zero-grazing units. A mixture of manure and *Grevillea* leaves make a very good addition to the soil.

**FURTHER READING:** <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Albrecht, 1993; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Blundell, 1987; Dharani, 2002; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Jensen, 1999; Katende et al., 1995; Lötschert and Beese, 1983; Mbuya et al., 1994; National Academy of Sciences, 1980; Noad and Birmie, 1989; Storrs, 1979.

