

Grewia tembensis

Tiliaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Deeka dima, Deka, Ogumdi; **Daasanach:** Damich arab; **Digo:** Mkone; **Ichamus:** Ikogom, Ikogomi; **Kamba:** Mutuva, Nduva (fruit); **Kipsigis:** Chesarebut; **Maasai:** Oirri, Oyiri, Iri (plural); **Mbeere:** Muruba; **Orma:** Deka dubra; **Pokot:** Toronwo; **Rendille:** Dook gudhan, Mulahanyo; **Samburu:** Irri; **Somali:** Demag, Dhamag, Dumag, Mured bonati (Tana River); **Taita:** Mmbogha; **Taveta:** Mwemba; **Turkana:** Emaleker, Emaleger.

DESCRIPTION: Small, usually **twiggy, multi-stemmed straggling shrub** to 4 m or occasionally more. **Stems long, narrow, whitish grey** to dark grey, smooth. **BARK:** Smooth, dotted with lenticels, later dark and rough. **LEAVES:** Widest from the middle towards the tip, thinly hairy, **slightly rough above, soft hairy below**, edge toothed, up to 2.5 x 4.5 cm. **FLOWERS:** Buds pinkish green. Flowers white to pink (sepals pinkish, petals white, stamens purplish pink). **FRUIT:** Each usually divided into **4 individual lobes**, each lobe roundish and 4–7 mm across, **hairy**, light green with some dark green patches on the surface, **ripening to orange** or bright red.

ECOLOGY: Distributed from Senegal east to Ethiopia and Djibouti and south to Botswana and Namibia. Widespread in Kenya, but uncommon in the western parts. Found in bushland, often riverine, 250–2,200 m. Surrounding bushes provide initial support for its long weak young stems. Soils varied, usually sandy or rocky, also red and black clay soils. Rainfall 500–800 mm. Agroclimatic Zones III–V. Flowers in the rainy season and fruits 2–3 months later.

USES: Firewood, construction (stems used for weaving granaries and traditional houses, spits for roasting meat), utensils (pegs, forked and hooked sticks for hives, stirrers), walking sticks, bows and arrows, edible fruit, medicine (roots), fodder, live fence, pen for writing Koranic tablets.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings, cuttings and root suckers. *Grewias* generally reproduce well naturally if protected from grazing and fire.

MANAGEMENT: Coppicing.

REMARKS: The bright orange-red fruit are sweet and much liked. Large quantities may be gathered and juice extracted (Kamba, Turkana). Fruit may be chewed and

the juice swallowed. Seeds may be swallowed too but large amounts may cause constipation. *G. similis* (**Kamba:** Mutuva wa kiima (Mbiuni, Machakos); **Kikuyu:** Mutheregendu, Mutheregendu, Theregendu (fruit); **Maasai:** Oyirri) resembles this species but usually has larger leaves, flowers and fruit. Stems are dark grey to brown. Leaves usually widest towards the tip, short stalked and conspicuously veined below. Flower bud greenish brown opening to a striking purple-blue or purple-pink blossom. Fruit 4-lobed, green, ripening to orange. This is a bushland and forest-edge species normally found at medium altitude. It is common around Nairobi.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Blundell, 1987; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999.

