

Ilex mitis**Aquifoliaceae****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **English:** African holly; **Kikuyu:** Munyamati, Muthumura; **Kipsigis:** Tongotuet; **Marakwet:** Seger; **Meru:** Murati; **Ogiek:** Tongotuet; **Sabaot:** Seger; **Samburu:** Lehenioibor.

DESCRIPTION: An evergreen shrub or tree, 4–24 m, very variable. The trunk usually short, but up to 1 m across with buttresses on large trees. **BARK:** Pale grey-brown, smooth; branchlets with a purple colour. **LEAVES:** Dark green and shiny, long oval to 14 cm, tip pointed, narrowing to a short stalk, the middle of the stalk deeply channelled into the thick leaf. The edge may have a few sharp spines. **FLOWERS:** Small (to 3 cm), white and fragrant, on hairy stalks beside leaves. **FRUIT:** Berry-like, 4–7 mm, yellow-green, ripening shiny red; soft and edible with 4–6 seeds inside.

ECOLOGY: This species extends from Ethiopia to South Africa, being widely distributed but extremely variable. In Kenya, it occurs in dry or moist highland and lower montane forests and may also be riverine; 1,450–3,150 m. Agroclimatic Zones I–III.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, timber (local construction), tool handles, farm implements, medicine (bark).

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings.

SEED: Collected from the ground and gradually dried.
treatment: Not necessary.

MANAGEMENT: Pruning, lopping and pollarding.

REMARKS: The hard white wood is used as timber, but normally the trunk is too short to obtain long boards. This is the only species in Kenya in a genus with several hundred members of mainly trees and shrubs found mostly in Asia and America.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Katende et al., 1995; Kokwaro, 1993; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002.

