

Lawsonia inermis (L. alba)

Lythraceae

Indigenous

- Common names: Eng: henna, Zanzibar bark; Swah: mhina, muina, mkokoa; Zigua: ina.
- Ecology: A shrub widely distributed from North to West and Central Africa. Common at the Tanzanian coast, along river courses and in semi-arid areas.
- Uses: Medicine, fodder (leaves), dye, perfumes, thatching, carriers for donkeys, ornamental.
- Description: A shrub or small tree to 4 m, sometimes spiny. LEAVES: small and oval, about 2-3 cm, opposite, often on short spine-tipped branchlets. FLOWERS: white and small in long branching heads, sweet-scented. FRUIT: round, small brown capsules, splitting into 4 parts.
- Propagation: Seedlings, cuttings.
- Seed info.: No. of seeds per kg: about 100,000. Germination is good: 70% after 3 weeks.
- treatment: not necessary.
- storage: can be stored for only a short period (2 months). Keep seeds insect free.
- Management: Slow growing.
- Remarks: The plant produces a volatile oil with a pleasant odour. An orange-red dye extracted from leaves and young shoots is used to dye clothes and leather, to decorate women's nails and skin, as well as to colour and condition hair ("henna"). The dye is released by using citric or tartaric acid, tea or lemon juice.

