

***Lippia kituiensis* (L. ukambensis)**

Verbenaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Kamba:** Muthiti, Mutheyti; **Kikuyu:** Muthiriti, Muthuroti, Mucohi; **Kipsigis:** Mwokiot; **Maasai:** Osinoni, Olsinoni, Ilsinon (plural); **Meru:** Muthirith, Muthiritii; **Pokot:** Mosonyon, Mojonyon, Chepchai; **Samburu:** Sinoni, Senoni; **Swahili:** Mvuti; **Taita:** Mvudi.

DESCRIPTION: A much-branched aromatic shrub to 3.5 m, stems hairy, often forming pure stands. **BARK:** On old stems rough with long fissures. **LEAVES:** Usually opposite, occasionally in 3s, long oval 2–12 cm long, tip usually blunt, the edges with shallow, finely round teeth, **upper and lower surfaces sandpapery**, almost stalkless. **FLOWERS:** Small and **white crowded in oval to hemispherical heads on stalks 2–6 cm**; up to 3 stalks beside leaves; the **corolla tube 2–4 mm with a yellow throat**. **Bracts at the base of the flower head are twice as wide as upper bracts**. **FRUIT:** Two dry fruit sections (mericarps) each with one seed.

ECOLOGY: Found in Kenya, south-eastern Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi in bushland, woodland, rough grassland, often on volcanic soil or lava rocks. Widespread in Kenya, but uncommon at the coast. It is an important plant on long-destroyed forest sites where it may be locally dominant in secondary bush, and at the margins of evergreen woodlands. A colonizer of cultivated or disturbed land, so a problem in rangelands; 400–2,600 m. Agroclimatic Zones III–V.

USES: Firewood, utensils (storage pots), arrow shafts, edible fruit, drink (leaves are boiled, sugar added and the liquid drunk), medicine (leaves), bee forage, ornamental, termite repellent (wood).

PROPAGATION: Can be propagated by seed, but there is no need for this since natural regeneration is profuse.

REMARKS: This plant is often used to flavour tea and in traditional medicine. Leaves are rich in an essential oil (myrcenone). It often forms a pure stand in disturbed areas.

Other species of *Lippia* in Kenya have similar uses. *L. carviadora* (**Pokot:** Chemchai, Tapa murkutwo;

Rendille: Galafu; **Samburu:** Leminyani, Lomunyanyi, Lmakutikuti, Reexam; **Somali:** Ged hamu, Dhaye dhabe **Turkana:** Eur) is a small much-branched shrub, usually 0.5–1.3 m. Stems are ribbed, dark grey, and branchlets grey with a peeling surface. Leaves very aromatic. It is found in Kenya, south-eastern Ethiopia and Somalia. In Kenya occurs in Turkana, Marsabit and Samburu in dry bushed grassland, usually on rocky ground, 500–1,150 m. The leaves are used for flavouring tea (Turkana, Pokot, Somali). In the past the leaves were chewed as tobacco and to cleanse the breath (Pokot). Leaves are often sold in Lodwar market (Turkana). *L. javanica* (**English:** Sedge plant, Wild tea; **Kamba:** Muthiiti; **Kikuyu:** Muthiriti; **Kipsigis:** Mwokiot; **Luo:** Ang'were rao, Mweny; **Maasai:** Osinoni, Ilsinon (plural); **Meru:** Muthiritii; **Pokot:** Mosonyon, Chepchai; **Samburu:** Sinoni; **Swahili:** Mvuti; **Taita:** Mvudi) is a shrub to 3 m, very common at mid-highland levels in disturbed areas,

especially around Nairobi. It resembles *L. kituiensis* but leaves are sandpapery only on the upper surface. This species easily invades areas opened for pasture.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Blundell, 1987; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Ruffo et al., 2002.

