

**Milicia excelsa** (*Chlorophora excelsa*)

Moraceae

**Indigenous**

STANDARD/TRADE NAME: Mvule, Iroko.

COMMON NAMES: **Boni:** Minarui; **Digo:** Mvure; **Giriama:** Mvure; **Kamba:** Kitangure, Muvuli; **Luhya:** Murumba; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumurumba; **Luo:** Olua, Olwa; **Meru:** Mururi; **Sanya:** Mvule; **Swahili:** Mvule; **Taveta:** Murie, Mvure; **Teso:** Eluwa.

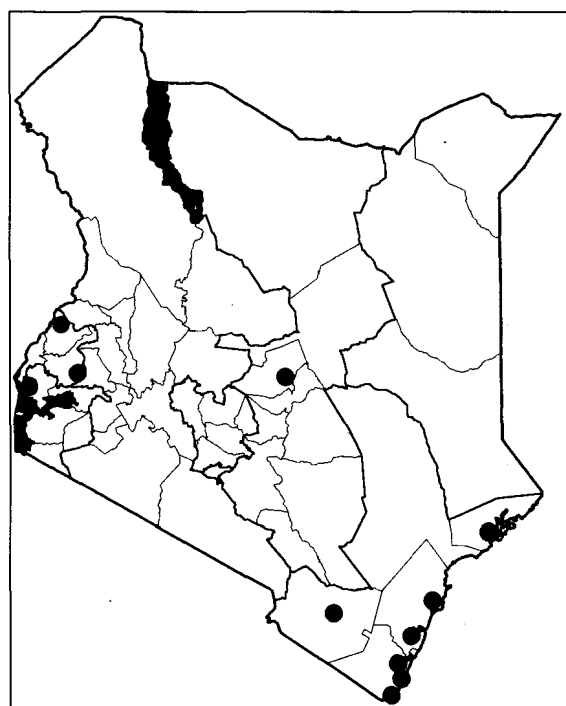
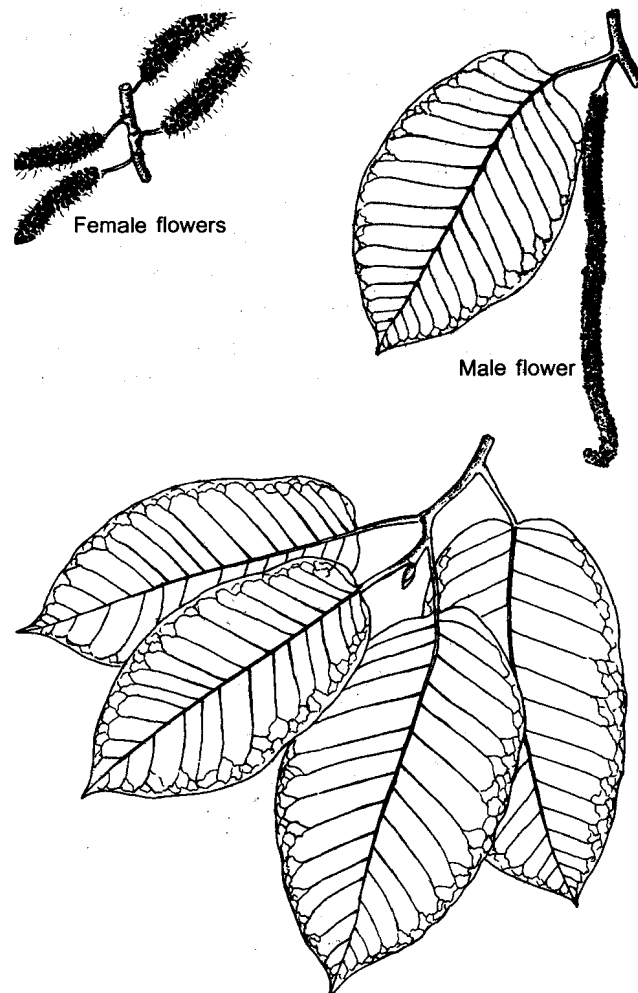
**DESCRIPTION:** A giant deciduous forest tree to 30 m or occasionally even more. Old trees may have a **straight trunk clear to 21 m and 2 m in diameter**. The high umbrella crown grows from a few thick branches. Ultimate branches hang down (only female trees; male trees have upright branches). **BARK:** Thick, pale, grey then brown, exudes slightly milky sap, as do the leaves. **LEAVES:** Large, **oval to 18 cm**, rather thin, a **well-pointed tip**, 10–18 pairs clear side veins, base rounded, often unequal-sided, stalk to 4 cm, **leaf edge finely toothed and wavy**. **FLOWERS:** Trees are male or female, both with small flowers in spikes, **male flowers in drooping catkins to 15 cm**, female shorter and thicker. **FRUIT:** Like a long green mulberry, 6–7 cm, the soft pulp attracting birds and bats. Fruit ferment rapidly on the ground. Small hard seeds lie in the pulp.

**ECOLOGY:** Widespread in tropical Africa, from Guinea Bissau to Angola and Sudan to Mozambique. In Kenya, it is occasional at the coast. Common in Rabai area. It is found in lowland forest and wet savanna and is logged commercially throughout its range. In the drier savanna areas the tree needs a good supply of underground water. It does not tolerate waterlogging and the soil must be well drained and relatively fertile. In Kenya, formerly more common but heavily exploited; remnants found at the coast and in Meru and Nyanza; 0–1,400 m. Agroclimatic Zones I–II.

**USES:** Firewood, charcoal, timber, poles, furniture, tool handles, boat building, medicine (bark), fodder, bee

forage, shade, ornamental, mulch, soil conservation, ceremonial.

**PROPAGATION:** Seedlings, wildings. Produces root suckers.



**Milicia excelsa** (cont)

**SEED:** The tree is not a prolific seeder. Germination slow and poor. Collect fruit (caterpillar-like syncarps) by cutting small twigs from the crown. Normally the seeds are mature before the syncarp is fully ripe. If the syncarps are not totally ripe they should be spread out in the shade for ripening. When ripe, they are soaked in water overnight and the seeds are squeezed off the fruit. Seed can be separated from the pulp by floating; the seeds will sink. Dry seeds in the shade for a few days before sowing. About 475,000 seeds per kg; germination rate up to 45%.

**treatment:** Not necessary.

**storage:** Seed loses viability quickly.

**MANAGEMENT:** Fast growing compared with other hardwoods, but slower than *Khaya* spp.; pruning, coppicing. Regeneration rates are low in most areas.

**REMARKS:** One of the most important timber species, but over-exploitation has made it very rare. The heartwood is brown to yellow and easy to work. The wood resists

termite attack almost as well as teak. It is extremely valuable timber, used especially for quality indoor and outdoor furniture. In Kenya, the species is now rare. Trees planted in Uganda 50 years ago are now ready for harvest, so there is scope for commercial production, but with some patience. In the Luo community, the tree is not planted in homesteads as it is believed to cause deaths within families, and traditionally the wood cannot be used for doors or beds. This species is one of only 2 in the genus, the other being the West African *Milicia regia*, also commercially referred to as Iroko (a Yoruba name). The 2 species occasionally hybridize where their distributions overlap.

**FURTHER READING:** <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Albrecht, 1993; Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Katende et al., 1995; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990.

