

Mondia whitei

Asclepiadaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Kikuyu:** Muhukura; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumukombera; **Luhya (Marachi):** Omugombera; **Luhya (Marama):** Omukombera; **Luhya (Tachoni):** Omikombela; **Luo:** Muombo, Ogombo.

DESCRIPTION: A woody climbing shrub, 5 m, from a tuberous rootstock, the stems twining over bushes. It has conspicuous milky white latex. **Easily recognized by a fringe of reflexed toothed stipules at each node, which become a hard spiky grey ring with age.** **LEAVES:** In opposite pairs, generally oval to almost circular, to 20 cm but usually smaller, heart-shaped at the base and with a clearly defined pointed tip. The midrib may have scattered hairs. **FLOWERS:** Small, on axillary drooping heads to 15 cm, the branches with few to many flowers, each about 2 cm across, with 5 hairy sepals, the 5 fleshy petal lobes mauve-purple inside, greenish outside, the central cream corona with many lobes, some thread-like. **FRUIT:** A pair of large diverging capsules about 12 cm long, containing many seeds bearing silky white hairs.

ECOLOGY: Distributed in moist tropical Africa. In Kenya, found in Kakamega Forest, Busia, Bungoma, Murang'a at forest edges, *Markhamia lutea* woodland and in riverine vegetation, often under trees on soft ground with plenty of humus, 1,500–2,000 m. Agroclimatic Zones I–III.

USES: Edible bark of roots, medicine (roots), ceremonial, toothbrushes (roots).

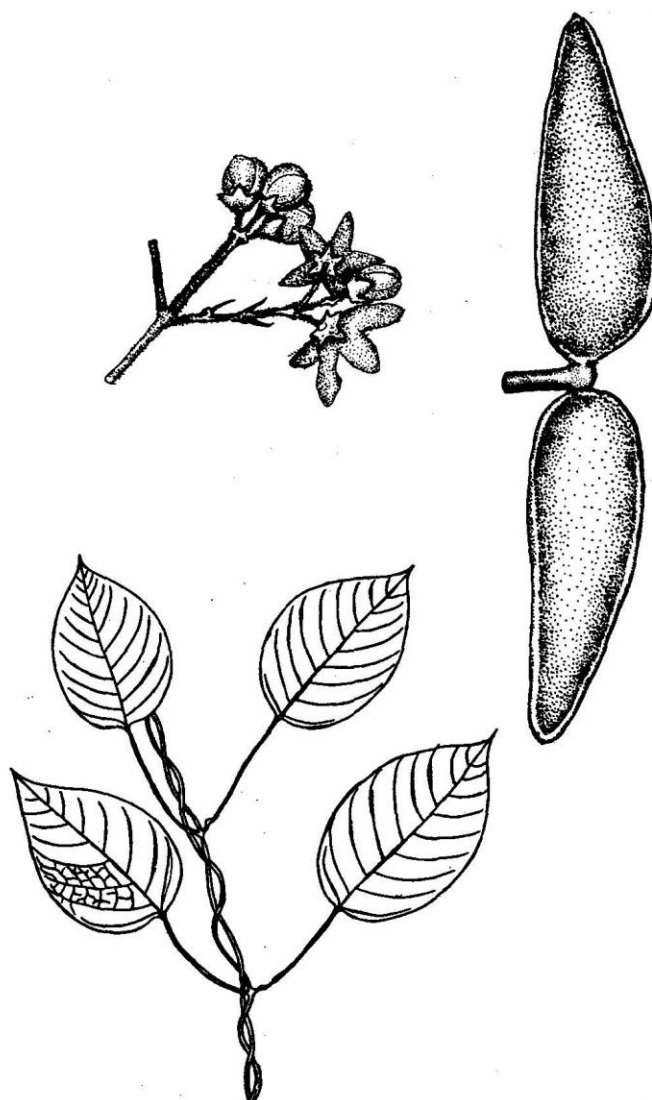
PROPAGATION: Cuttings, seedlings.

SEED:

treatment: Not necessary.

REMARKS: The fleshy bark of the thin roots is eaten raw or occasionally dried (Kikuyu, Luhya, Nandi, Luo) for its good taste, as an appetizer (Luhya), to freshen the mouth (Luhya, Kikuyu) and for pleasure (Kikuyu). The root tastes rather hot and bitter at first then slightly sweet later. It leaves a persistent spicy taste in the mouth that is easily recognized. The root may be dried, stored and eaten when desired. The woody middle part of thicker roots is reported to be used as a toothbrush. Roots chewed for good luck (Luhya) before setting out to perform a difficult task. Roots are sold in Western Province and in Nairobi. The plant is now quite rare in Central Province and populations in Western Province are under increasing pressure due to the high demand for the roots. The main threat is that of destruction of its habitat. *Mondia* is a genus of humid tropical Africa with at most 2 species.

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



Root with section of bark removed

