

***Myrsine africana*****Myrsinaceae****Indigenous**

**COMMON NAMES:** **Kamba:** Muketa munini; **Kikuyu:** Mugaita; **Kipsigis:** Osegeteti; **Maasai:** Eseketeti, Olseketeti, Seketeti (seed), Enkoduai; **Marakwet:** Segatet, Segetetwa; **Meru:** Tigiji; **Nandi:** Seketetwa; **Samburu:** Seketeta; **Tugen:** Segetetwa; **Turkana:** Ekaiyi.

**DESCRIPTION:** An evergreen perennial undershrub or small tree, 1–5 m, often much branched; branches grey–brown–purple and finely grooved, new shoots densely hairy.

**BARK:** Red-brown, rough. **LEAVES:** Alternate, simple and small, 0.5–2 cm long, rather crowded on branchlets, leathery, shiny green above, almost stalkless, variable in shape, the margin usually with tiny sharp teeth, often confined to the apex, tip narrowed, often notched, base narrowed. **FLOWERS:** Small (3 mm), male and female or both, in axillary clusters among new leaves, green-white to pink-crimson, rather large purple anthers hang out beyond the 4 petals, calyx with glands. **FRUIT:** Round berries, 5-mm diameter, pink-purple when ripe, thinly fleshy, containing 1 seed.

**ECOLOGY:** Distributed from the Azores off the west coast of Africa east through the Arabian peninsula to China. In Europe cultivated from seed as an ornamental shrub. Also widespread in montane areas of eastern Africa from Ethiopia to Zambia, Angola and South Africa. In Kenya, widely distributed in highland areas from the Taita Hills north-west to the Kisii highlands and north to Samburu and Turkana Districts. Very common in highland areas of Nyandarua. Found particularly in upland dry forests and rocky hillsides, in open woodland or at margins of dry forests. Often a pioneer species. Grows above the limit for taller trees on mountains, near the moorlands, 1,500–3,000 m. Agroclimatic Zones II–III.

**USES:** Branches used for weaving structures (withies), edible fruit, medicine (fruit), ornamental, veterinary medicine.

**PROPAGATION:** Seedlings.

**MANAGEMENT:** Prune to desired shape if grown as an ornamental.

**REMARKS:** The berries are dried, ground and made into an extract or infusion like tea, which is taken as an anthelmintic.

With similar seeds that find the same anthelmintic use is *Rapanea melanophloeos* (**English:** Rapanea; **Kamba:** Muketa munene; **Keiyo:** Situtua; **Kikuyu:** Mugaita; **Maasai:** Olengabura; **Marakwet:** Sitotwet; **Meru:** Mugeta, Muthitha; **Nandi:** Situtwa; **Ogiek:** Kwarabariet; **Pokot:** Sirtuot; **Sabaot:** Situtwa). This is an evergreen tree to 15 m with a bark that is grey outside and red inside. Young branches are weak, purple, and with conspicuous leaf scars. Leaves up to 5 x 11 cm, widest in the middle or towards the tip, light green, with dots of resin, glossy above, and clustered at branch tips; leaf stalk and midrib red when young. Flowers clustered below leaves, small, white to yellow-green. Fruit small, purple, round, up to 5 mm. Found from the coast to the western part of the country and most of tropical Africa to

South Africa. It is more common in highland forests to altitudes as high as 3,800 m. Most parts of the plant are used as medicine (mainly against intestinal worms). The wood is soft and finds some limited use as timber.

**FURTHER READING:** Beentje, 1994; ITDG and IIRR, 1996; Kokwaro, 1993; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002.

