

Ocotea usambarensis

Lauraceae

Indigenous

- Common names: Chag: mseri, muwong, mwawong; Eng: camphor, East African camphor wood; Hehe: muheti; **Kinga**: mbawira; Nyak: msibisibi; **Nyiha**: nsebi; **Pare**: maase, maasi; **Samb**: mkulo, mtoa-mada; **Samb** (west): mkenene.
- Ecology: A majestic evergreen timber tree widely distributed throughout East Africa and common in the wetter mountain forests of Tanzania, e.g. Kilimanjaro, the Usambaras, Pares, Ulugurus, and Tukuyu and Iringa. For optimum growth, it requires deep fertile soils with good drainage. Its climatic range is wet montane up to 2,600 m.
- Uses: Timber (joinery, furniture), veneer/plywood, panelling, medicine (roots, inner bark).
- Description: Mature trees may reach 40 m with a massive trunk up to 3 m across, slightly fluted at the base. Young trees are green-grey shapely cones. Leaves and wood are camphor scented but not the bark. **BARK**: grey, granular, then **red-brown**, scaling in **large rectangular flakes**. **LEAVES**: shiny dark green, oval to rounded, **grey-white below**, the veins wavy **and** brown, **the** edge **thickened**, often curled under. **FLOWERS**: separate male and female flowers, 8-10 yellow-white-green flowers, very small, hairy and stalked. **FRUIT**: smooth and green, very small, oval, to 6 mm, calyx cup very small, seeds surrounded by pulp.
- Propagation: Root suckers, seedlings.
- Seed info.: Fruit may be attacked by insects but the tree produces plenty of seed. No. of seeds per kg: 6,600. In best conditions 45% germination in 30-45 days, but it is often sporadic, within 2-3 months,
- treatment: not necessary.
- storage: sow seed immediately after extraction from the fruit as they do not store.
- Management: Fast growing.
- Remarks: In Tanzania, the natural camphor forests in Usambara and Kilimanjaro are intensively managed. The tree can be multiplied by lifting natural root suckers produced in profusion near and around the stumps of felled trees. This is encouraged due to the fact that camphor seed is scarce except during "mast" years which occur every third or fourth year. Camphor is among the reserved trees of Tanzania as it produces one of the most valuable timbers in East Africa. The timber is dark brown, strong and highly resistant to fungi and acids, although not to termites.

