

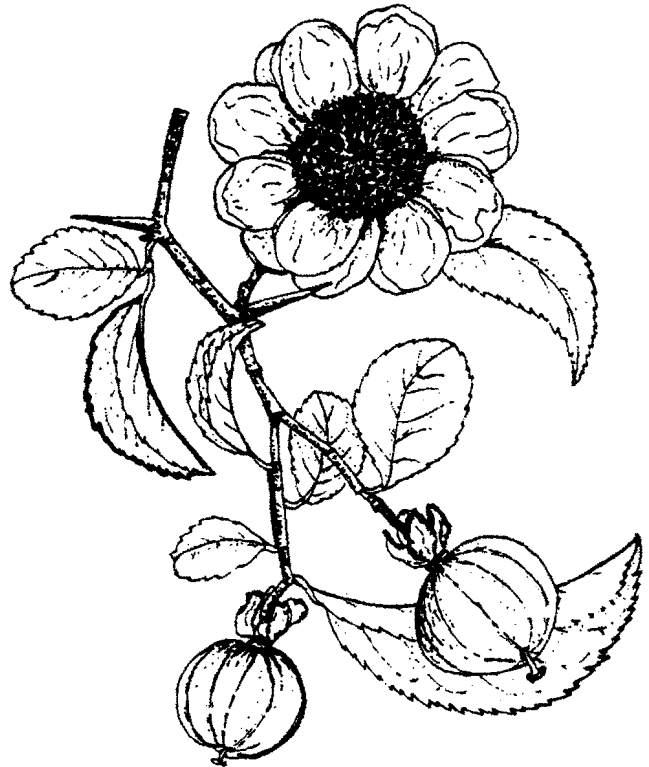
Oncoba spinosa

Flacourtiaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Boni:** Mawachandovu; **Boran:** Akoku; **Kikuyu:** Muigaigua, Kiage; **Kipsigis:** Tungurwet; **Luo:** Saa; **Malakote:** Muchaagu; **Meru:** Mwege; **Orma:** Shiko; **Pokot:** Kukughu onyot; **Pokomo:** Muh'puju, Mpuju; **Sabaot:** Kimesan; **Somali:** Siko; **Tugen:** Tongurua, Takuriya.

DESCRIPTION: A semi-deciduous spiny shrub or small tree 4–10 m, much branched to a rounded bushy crown. **BARK:** Smooth, pale grey to brown, young branches speckled with lenticel dots, becoming dark brown, scaly with age. Branches with straight, axillary spines to 8 cm, slender and sharp, while the main trunk may have shorter compound thorns. **LEAVES:** Alternate, leathery, strong shiny green, often recurved, broadly oval, about 8 cm long, margin with small rounded or pointed teeth, sometimes few, base tapering to a short stalk, tip well pointed. **FLOWERS:** Solitary, showy and fragrant, white or pale pink, up to 9 cm across, on stalks 1–2 cm, with 8–10 white overlapping petals about 3 cm long, twice the size of 4 sepal lobes, a mass of golden stamens in the centre, the green-cream central stigma knob about 4 mm across (seen clearly on young fruit). **FRUIT:** Round, shiny red-brown when ripe, 5–6 cm in diameter, the hard 'shell' marked with 8 faint lines, the old calyx persisting. Inside, shiny brown seeds lie in a dry thick yellow-brown pulp, edible but sour.



ECOLOGY: A spiny tree or shrub well distributed throughout tropical Africa over a wide range of altitude north to the Arabian peninsula and south to South Africa. In Kenya, widely distributed throughout the country in humid riverine forests and moist bushland, 0–1,800 m. Found, for example, along Tana River and in Western Province. Agroclimatic Zones I–III.

USES: Firewood, timber (furniture), edible fruit, medicine (roots), ornamental.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings.

SEED:

treatment: Break up and mash the fruit to extract the seed.

REMARKS: When seeds dry in the fruit they can be used as rattles by children and dancers. The species has potential as an ornamental, but is not much liked in cultivated areas because of its thorns, and it is also said to compete with crops. It is an important medicinal plant. The wood is rather soft. The related species *Oncoba routledgei* (**Kikuyu:** Mwigaiwa; **Kipsigis:** Takungwuiet; **Luhya:** Shirakalu; **Luo:** Sao; **Meru:** Mwege) is a shrub or a small tree to 10 m. It has mainly a western Kenya distribution. It is found in moist highland areas, especially along rivers. The leaf margins have larger teeth (>1 mm). Fruit shiny yellow to 6 cm. Like *O. spinosa*, this species is used a great deal in traditional medicine. It has now been exterminated in some regions as a result of over-harvesting. The genus *Oncoba* with only a few members occurs naturally only in Africa.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Blundell, 1987; Kokwaro, 1993; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979; van Wyk, 1993.

Fruit

