

Opilia campestris* var. *campestris

Opiliaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Godgodub, Goldigoloba; **Ilchamus:** Afuguba; **Kamba:** Muvuluvulu; **Maasai:** Engangolol, Engirushai; **Orma:** Afgub; **Somali:** Afgub; **Tharaka:** Kauru; **Wardei:** Afgub.

DESCRIPTION: A deciduous shrub to 5 m high, **appearing spiny when leafless** because of the numerous short twigs. **BARK:** Grey-brown or yellowish, splitting longitudinally, with corky lenticels forming ridges. **LEAVES:** Usually widest in the middle, up to 4 x 5 cm, **hairy when young**, later becoming hairless. **FLOWERS:** Small, yellowish green or cream, in racemes (flower stalks growing from a single axis) that are **scaly on the surface** (due to bracts) and **packed together enough when young** to appear cone-like, **appearing before the leaves are fully expanded**. **FRUIT:** Round but slightly elongate, widest in the middle, about 1 cm across, pale green to purple, succulent.

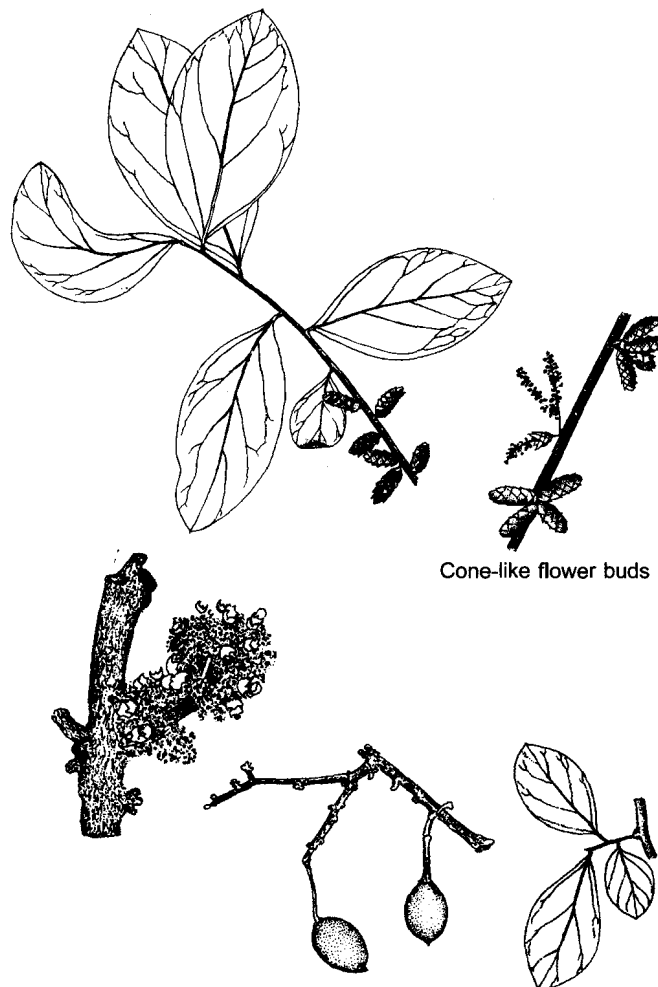
ECOLOGY: Found in Kenya and Tanzania south to Mozambique. In Kenya, widely distributed in semi-arid parts of Eastern, North Eastern and Coast Provinces and also Kajiado and Samburu Districts. It is a common plant in Kitui District. It occurs in dry deciduous bushland and wooded grassland, often on anthills; 0–1,500 m. Agroclimatic Zones V–VI.

USES: Edible fruit, fodder (leaves browsed by camels, goats), ornamental, toothbrushes.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings.

REMARKS: This species has potential as a homestead plant, where it can serve both as a source of fruit and as an ornamental. A related and very similar species is *Opilia amentacea* (**Giriama:** Msigande; **Ilchamus:** Afuguba; **Kamba:** Muvuluvulu; **Maasai:** Engirushai; **Swahili:** Msigande), which is usually a liana, but occasionally a weak shrub. The bark resembles that of *O. campestris*. Leaves are alternate, on short stalks about 5 mm, widest in the middle and up to about 5 x 10 cm, shiny above, stiff, with a rounded or sharp tip. Flowers resemble those of *O. campestris* but racemes are longer (up to 5.5 cm) and the fruits resemble those of *O. campestris* but are larger (to 1.5–2 cm long), pale yellow to orange. The fruit are edible. This species occurs in southern, coastal, western and north-western parts of Kenya in bushland, especially *Acacia* woodland and riparian vegetation. It is found in most of eastern Africa, and is distributed in tropical Africa as far south as Angola. The wood is soft and used for toothbrushes and small household utensils. The flexible stems are also made into seats. When climbing on other plants such as acacias, the plant provides good shade. The genus *Opilia* has only 2 species.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Ruffo, 2002 (*O. amentacea*).



Cone-like flower buds

