

Papaea capensis

Sapindaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Pika; **English:** Cape pappea; **Kamba:** Mba (fruit); **Kikuyu:** Ndirikumii; **Kipsigis:** Ngonyet, Engongaat; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumunyamanyama; **Luo:** Okuoro (Siaya), Okworo, Omaange (Homa Bay); **Maasai:** Oltimigomi, Warkisik ong'u, Orkisikong'u, Natua ekongu, Natwa ongo; **Marakwet:** Kipiriokwa, Kibiriokwo, Piriak (plural); **Mbeere:** Mubaa; **Meru:** Ntirikomi, Dilikoni; **Pokot:** Puriokwo, Priokwo, Priak (plural); **Samburu:** Loposeta, Lopisedi, Lgurugu, Lgurongui, Leroongo; **Somali:** Asel, Adadak; **Taita:** Mndendele, Ndendele (fruit), Mkongori; **Tugen:** Biriokwo; **Turkana:** Etolelh.

DESCRIPTION: A small, leafy, semi-deciduous tree, usually to 6 m, with a short trunk branching low down to form a spreading, rounded crown. **BARK:** Pale to dark grey, smooth, with horizontal markings. **LEAVES:** Distinctive, oblong, usually in terminal clusters, dull dark green, stiff and wavy, the edge sometimes spine-toothed, base rounded. **FLOWERS:** Green-yellow, in spikes to 12 cm, male flowers terminal, female at the base of the spike. **FRUIT:** Round, furry green capsules about 1 cm across, split to reveal a bright orange-red jelly (the aril) covering a shiny dark red-brown to black oval seed. This edible seed kernel is rich in oil. The juicy flesh is edible, slightly acid but pleasantly flavoured.

ECOLOGY: From Eritrea, Ethiopia and northern Somalia in the north, south through eastern Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo to South Africa in the south. Widespread in Kenya in the wetter and higher parts of the semi-arid zones. Found in bushland and wooded or bushed grassland, 1,050–2,400 m, especially in black clay, sandy soil, sloping rocky ground with clay or sand. Agroclimatic Zones II–V. Flowers in February–March in Narok, May–June in Makueni and Machakos, August in Homa Bay, November–December in Baringo and Marsabit; fruits in February–March in Laikipia, August–September in Kajiado, Machakos, Kitui and Samburu.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, timber, furniture (stools), poles, tool handles, utensils (pestles, mortars, yokes, traditional sticks for cooking *ugali*, forked and hooked sticks for hanging beehives), bows, yokes, edible fruit, drink (tea from inner bark), medicine (oil, bark), fodder (fruit and leaves for cattle and goats during dry periods), bee forage, shade, ornamental, dye.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings. Also produces root suckers.



SEED:

treatment: Not necessary.

MANAGEMENT: A slow-growing tree; coppices well.

REMARKS: Fruits, which have a sweet-sour taste, are eaten both ripe and unripe. Inner bark is used to make tea (Maasai, Kipsigis). Roots used in soup (Kikuyu). Tender shoots and young leaves are chewed (Maasai). Ripe fruit liked by birds. The wood is hard, durable and tough with a twisted grain. In the Tugen Hills the tree flowers during the driest years. *P. capensis* is the only member of the genus *Papaea*.

FURTHER READING: Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Blundell, 1987; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; van Wyk, 1993.

