

*Parinari curatellifolia*

## Chrysobalanaceae

**Indigenous**

**COMMON NAMES:** Embu: Mura; **English:** Mobola plum; **Kisii:** Omoraa; **Kuria:** Omutaburu; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumurinda (tree), Kamarinda (fruit); **Luhya (Tachoni):** Amarinda (fruit), Omurinda (tree); **Luo:** Ong'ora; **Maasai:** Olmatakuroi; **Mbeere:** Muura, Maura (fruit).

**DESCRIPTION:** A savanna shrub or tree to 15 m with **erect branches and a dense rounded crown**. Trunk occasionally buttressed at the base. **BARK:** Rough, dark grey-brown, grooved, later flaking in large squares. The **sap is reddish**. **Young shoots with yellow-brown hairs**. **LEAVES:** **Oval and alternate**, with **clear parallel veins**, shiny green above but hairy grey-white below, to 8 cm long and 4.5 cm wide, **tip blunt or notched**; on a short stalk. **FLOWERS:** Small, white-pink in short **flat-topped heads**, to 6 cm across. Flower stalks and the calyx have yellow-brown woolly hairs. **FRUIT:** **Oval to 5 cm**, with grey scales over **yellow-red-brown skin**. The fibrous yellow flesh is sweet but sharp and contains a hard stone with **one edible seed kernel**.

**ECOLOGY:** From Senegal east to Sudan and south to north-eastern South Africa and north-eastern Namibia. In Kenya, e.g. in Embu, Kisii, Maasai Mara, Homa Bay, Kuria and Kwale in bushland, wooded grassland, forest edges, 0–2,100 m; rainfall 700–1,500 mm. Common on sandy and light clay soils and rocky hill slopes. Agroclimatic Zones III–IV. Flowers in March in Embu, December in Kisii, July in Narok, September in Kwale; fruits in May–June in Embu, in July–August in Bungoma.

**USES:** Firewood, charcoal, timber, poles, edible fruit, medicine (bark, root), bee forage, shade, oil (seed kernel), dye.

**PROPAGATION:** Seedlings (sow seeds in pots), wildings. Also produces root suckers.

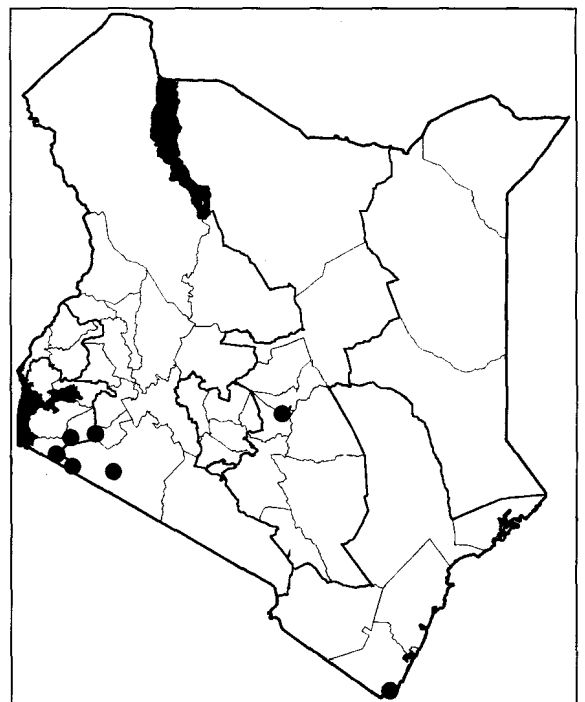
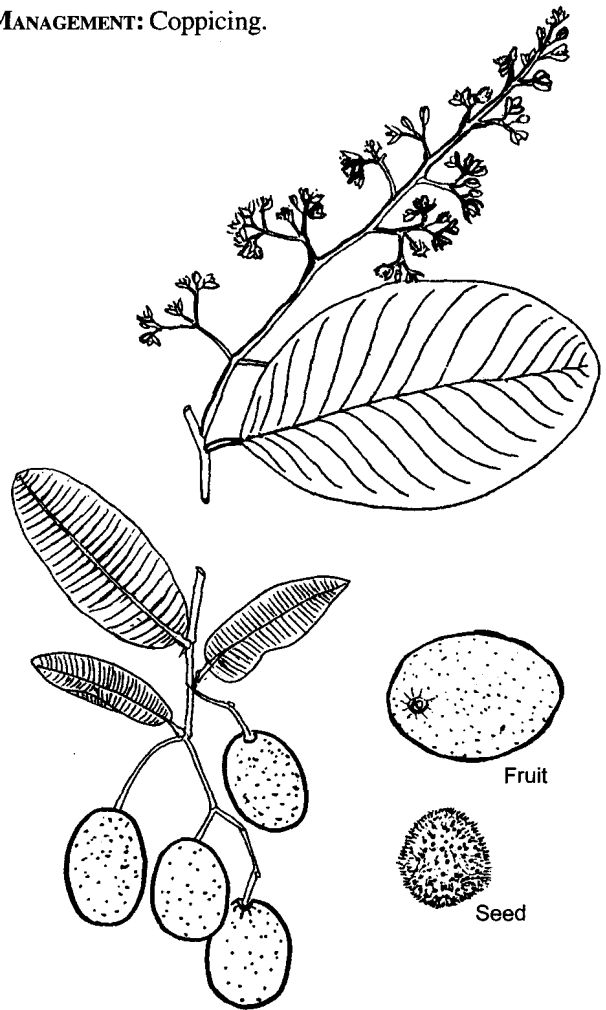
**SEED:** Collect fruit when ripe and soft. Put in a trench for the pulp to disintegrate and separate seeds, gradually dry and store.

**treatment:** The seed coat is very hard; immerse in hot water, allow to cool and soak for 24 hours. Alternatively, crack the seed coat with a hammer or stone. Without

treatment, the seed may take up to 6 months to germinate.

**storage:** The seed is oily and should not be stored for long.

**MANAGEMENT:** Coppicing.



***Parinari curatellifolia* (cont)**

**REMARKS:** The ripe fruit pulp is sweet with a strong pineapple smell. An important fruit tree, usually preserved by farmers. In southern Africa it is used for making both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. The wood is red, hard and durable but difficult to cut and plane (silica crystals can blunt saw blades and other tools). The seeds have a high oil content. Two subspecies are recognized:

subsp. *curatellifolia* with leaves that have silvery grey hairs on the lower surface and in Kenya found inland in Embu, Kisii, Narok, Kuria, Homa Bay and Migori. It is commonest from Tanzania north-west to Senegal.

subsp. *mobola* with a brown hairy underside to the leaves and, on average, longer flowers. It is common in coastal areas and is the commonest in southern Africa.

Also in the same family is *Hirtella zanzibarica* (Digo: Mwawa), an evergreen tree with a buttressed base and smooth dark bark. Its ripe reddish fruit, which may be up

to 25 mm long, are edible. It is found at the southern Kenyan coast, especially in the Shimba Hills. All these species were earlier placed in the family Rosaceae. *P. curatellifolia* is valued almost as much as *Sclerocarya birrea*. Their fruits resemble each other and are used in a similar manner; hence the local names are sometimes the same or share a common root. *P. curatellifolia* is the species under which David Livingstone, the 19th-century explorer, was buried. The genus *Parinari*, with a few dozen members, is distributed over most of the tropics of New and Old Worlds, including the Indian and Pacific Ocean islands.

**FURTHER READING:** <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Katende et al., 1995, 1999; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979; van Wyk, 1993.



*Hirtella zanzibarica*