

Piliostigma thonningii* (*Bauhinia thonningii*)*Fabaceae (Caesalpiaceae)****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Abairtubata; **Chonyi:** Mkyamba; **Digo:** Mtsekeshu, Mutsekete; **English:** Camel's foot; **Giriama:** Mkyamba; **Kamba:** Mukolokolo; **Kambe:** Mkyamba; **Luhya:** Mbako, Mboyela; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumuyenjanyenje, Kumulamalama; **Luo:** Ogalo, Otagalo, Tagalo; **Maasai:** Olsagararam, Ilsagararam (plural); **Mbeere:** Mukuura; **Nandi:** Kipsarkiat; **Pokot:** Koyopkwo; **Sabaot:** Sakiandet; **Samburu:** Lecholo; **Sanya:** Kimanjala; **Swahili:** Msegese, Mchekeche, Mchikichi; **Teso:** Epapai; **Tharaka:** Mukuura; **Turkana:** Eugomamur.

DESCRIPTION: A rounded deciduous tree, 3–5 m, branches twisted (occasionally climbing). **BARK:** Thick, dark and rough, fibrous within. Dark red if cut. **LEAVES:** **Large and bilobed**, a small bristle in the deep notch, often folded along midrib, **leathery**, pale green, to 12 cm long, lower surface brown, hairy, in between **many raised veins**. **FLOWERS:** **White, cream or pink, hanging down in sprays 10–20 cm, 5 petals, only 2 cm long, the calyx cups very hairy, fragrant**. **FRUIT:** **Flat brown and woody pods, hairy at first, 15–20 cm long, persisting on the tree but finally decaying on the ground to free pea-sized seeds. Pulp surrounding the seed is eaten.**

ECOLOGY: Widespread in Africa from Senegal to Sudan and south to Namibia and South Africa in open wooded grassland. Grows in various soils, commonly in sand. In Kenya, found at the coast, the Rift Valley and Nyanza, often in grassland with scattered trees or in wooded grassland with *Combretum*, 0–1,850 m. Agroclimatic Zones I–IV.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, posts (house construction), edible fruit (pulp from pods), edible fresh inner bark and young leaves chewed, medicine (roots, leaves and bark), fodder (young pods and young leaves), bee forage, shade, ornamental, mulch, soil conservation, fibre, tannin, dye (roots and bark), live fence, soap.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings (sow in pots). Produces root suckers from exposed roots.

SEED: The tree produces many seeds with good germination rate. About 7,200 seeds per kg. Seeds difficult to extract. Dry the pods in the sun, cut them into pieces and pound in a mortar to separate the seeds from the pulp.

treatment: Soak seed in cold water for 24 hours, or nick the seed coat at the distal (cotyledon) end of the seed.

storage: Seed can be stored for long periods.

MANAGEMENT: Fast growing; coppicing, pollarding.

REMARKS: A good tree for intercropping, often left in shambas. Roots and pods a substitute for soap. Roots and bark yield a red-brown dye (Kikuyu, Maasai). The medicinal uses are very important and it is fire resistant.

FURTHER READING: Albrecht, 1993; Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Katende et al., 1995, 1999; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979; van Wyk, 1993; von Maydell, 1990.

