

## *Pistacia aethiopica*

## Anacardiaceae

### Indigenous

**COMMON NAMES:** **Kamba:** Musaa; **Kikuyu:** Muhehete, Mucherere; **Kipsigis:** Kibirirgorokiet, Chepkorokwet; **Maasai:** Oldangudwa, Oltangotua; **Samburu:** Olongoronok, Ittorel, Lasamarai; **Tugen:** Tulda.

**DESCRIPTION:** A spreading evergreen shrub or tree usually 3–15 m, often multi-stemmed. **BARK:** Rough, brown-black, exuding a resinous gum if cut, most parts smell of turpentine or mango when crushed. **LEAVES:** Compound to 10 cm long on a characteristic winged stalk, **aromatic**, usually 3–4 pairs of opposite leaflets, each 1–5 cm long, **red when young**, stiff when mature, few or no hairs. **FLOWERS:** Very small, greenish (olivaceous), purplish or yellow-cream **with a red tinge on the stalks**, in **compact heads on stalks** 1–5 cm, no petals but tiny petal-like bracteoles, 4–6 stamens. **FRUIT:** Small, rounded, **red on one side only**, to 5 mm diameter, containing one flattened seed, smelling like mango when crushed.

**ECOLOGY:** In Kenya, very common in highland parts of Kajiado and also around Nairobi and the highlands along the Rift Valley, such as Loita highlands. Occurs in dry upland forest often in association with *Juniperus procera*, *Podocarpus* and *Olea* and associated evergreen bushland or thicket and wooded savanna, 800–2,400 m. More or less wiped out around Nairobi as it is cut to obtain a gum for chewing. Agroclimatic Zones III–IV.

**USES:** Firewood, poles (house construction), tool handles, edible gum, drink (a root or bark infusion is drunk as a herbal tea), medicine, bee forage, ornamental, tooth-brushes (twigs).

**PROPAGATION:** Seedlings.

**REMARKS:** The trunk yields a high-quality gum that is chewed by the Maasai. Several other species in the genus occur in the Mediterranean region, and also Asia and America.

The commercial pistachio nut (edible, also used in ice creams, etc.) comes from *P. vera*, a tree of west and central Asia, but this species has never been successfully introduced into Kenya. The aromatic resin of *P. atlantica* is used for varnish (Bombay mastic) and flavouring drinks.

**FURTHER READING:** Beentje, 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Ruffo et al., 2002.

