

Plectranthus barbatus

Labiatae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Kamba:** Kyoooya, Kyoya, Muvou, Mwoya, Mwooya; **Kikuyu:** Maigoya; **Luhya:** Shilauha; **Luo:** Okita; **Meru:** Mwaraka; **Nandi:** Irakwet.

DESCRIPTION: An aromatic woody herb forming a dense bush or shrub 1–4 m high. **Stems and roots somewhat fleshy.** Young stems angled in cross-section. **LEAVES:** **Large, soft,** widest in the middle or towards the base, **up to 12 x 11 cm,** softly hairy on both surfaces, margins toothed, aromatic. **FLOWERS:** **Blue to blue-purple,** in terminal heads up to 40 cm long.

ECOLOGY: A tropical Old World species. In Kenya, widely distributed from the coast to western regions, but rather uncommon at the coast and in the very dry areas of north and north-eastern Kenya. Found at forest margins, in wooded grasslands, rocky grasslands and moist bushland, and frequently planted as a hedge, 600–2,800 m. Agroclimatic Zones I–IV.

USES: Medicine (shoots, roots), live fence, banana ripening (leaves), alternative to toilet paper (leaves), perfume (fragrant leaves), ornamental.

PROPAGATION: Cuttings and rhizomes.

MANAGEMENT: Coppicing; once established it shoots up fast after cutting from the succulent below-ground stems and roots.

REMARKS: This is the commonest of the larger *Plectranthus* species in Kenya. It is commonly used as a hedge plant, especially among the Kikuyu and Kamba. Leaves are used to speed up banana ripening. Leaves are soft and used as a natural toilet tissue. It is commonly used for medicine. Many species in this genus have beautiful flowers and hence potential as ornamentals. *Plectranthus* is a relatively large genus with close to 200 members in the warm parts of the Old World.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Blundell, 1987; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Kokwaro, 1993.

