

***Podocarpus falcatus* (*P. gracilior*)**

## Podocarpaceae

**Indigenous**

**COMMON NAMES:** **English:** Podo; **Keiyo:** Benet; **Kikuyu:** Muthengera; **Kipsigis:** Saptet; **Maasai:** Olpiripiri, Orpiripiri, Ormusanduku; **Marakwet:** Ben, Benet; **Meru:** Mubiribiri; **Nandi:** Piripiriet; **Ogiek:** Marabet; **Samburu:** Piripirindi; **Sabaot:** Sapta, Saptet; **Tugen:** Benet; **Turkana:** Lotimat.

**DESCRIPTION:** An evergreen tree with a straight bole, to 25 m or more. **BARK:** Grey to dark brown, cracking and scaling into irregular rectangles. **LEAVES:** Narrow, shiny dark green, 2–5 cm, gradually tapering. Young leaves larger and brighter giving a green flush. **CONES:** 1–3 male catkins, yellow-brown, about 2 cm; female cones hard, rounded to 2 cm, very slow to develop, green with dull purple bloom, outer shell thin but inner flesh eaten by monkeys and birds.

**ECOLOGY:** Podo trees are mainly found in the southern hemisphere, particularly in the temperate zones and tropical highlands. They are conifers, the closest related species being yews and junipers, not pines. They are also known as yellow-woods. *P. falcatus* is a large tree of upland subhumid forest and dry *Olea-Juniperus* forest, 1,500–2,400 m. May be locally dominant in dry highland forests. Found on Mt Elgon and Cherangani Hills, the Loita Hills, Samburu, Baringo and western Mt Kenya. Agroclimatic Zones II–III. Flowers in December–February and fruits in March–April in Mt Elgon.

**USES:** Firewood, timber (boxes, boards, panelling), furniture, poles, plywood, medicine (bark), shade, ornamental.

**PROPAGATION:** Seedlings, wildings.

**SEED:** About 1,300 seeds per kg; germination 30–40%.

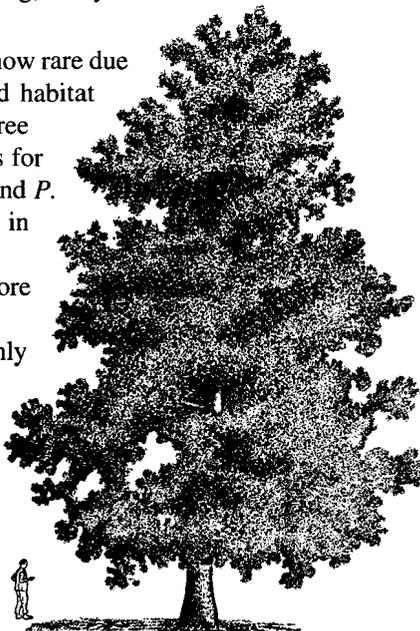
Separate pulp from seed immediately after collection by soaking in water for 24 hours, then rubbing and floating. Dry seeds.

**treatment:** Crack the hard woody seed shell before sowing if the seeds were not stored for long. Stored seeds need no treatment.

**storage:** Seed can be stored for long periods.

**MANAGEMENT:** Slow growing; hardy once established.

**REMARKS:** The species is now rare due to over-exploitation and habitat destruction. The large tree trunks are often habitats for bees. Both *P. falcatus* and *P. latifolius* may be found in same habitats, but *P. latifolius* tends to be more common in the wetter areas. Both are commonly grown as ornamentals and are therefore available in nurseries. The wood needs preservatives and careful seasoning to prevent warping. The genus *Podocarpus* with close to 100



members is mainly found in the temperate parts of the southern hemisphere (e.g. New Zealand, South America). Near the equator the species tend to be found in highlands.

**FURTHER READING:** <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Albrecht, 1993; Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Dharani, 2002; Kokwaro, 1993; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990; Storrs, 1979; van Wyk, 1993.

