

Premna resinosa

Verbenaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Dadessa, Tatessa; **Digo:** Mursapungu, Mvuma; **Giriama:** Mkitsano, Mvuma nyuki, Mvuma; **Kamba:** Mukaakaa; **Maasai:** Olmakarikara; **Orma:** Kate dimtu; **Pokomo:** Mukirikonko, Mphumphune; **Pokot:** Kekechwo; **Rendille:** Namaniela; **Samburu:** Lemaloni; **Somali:** Gradha gradha; **Swahili:** Mvumba ngombe; **Taita:** Mugamia, Mugambia; **Tharaka:** Mukarakara; **Tugen:** Kekech; **Turkana:** Ikorderedet.

DESCRIPTION: A much-branched shrub 1–4 m, older stems square in section. **BARK:** Thin, white-brown, peeling in strips. **LEAVES:** **Opposite, sometimes in 4s**, 2 large, 2 smaller leaves, oval to 7 cm long, edge sometimes with rounded teeth, usually shiny above and **a few hairs below**, base rounded or **narrowed to a short leaf stalk**. Both sides **dotted with glands**, aromatic-spicy smell when crushed. **FLOWERS:** **Green-white** with 4 tiny petals, in **loose terminal heads** 2–6 cm long. **FRUIT:** **Pea-sized or oval, 4–7 mm, red–purple–black** with thin fleshy skin, within the **enlarged green calyx cup**.

ECOLOGY: A common shrub in the drier parts of the region. Widely distributed in arid and semi-arid parts of Kenya, particularly lowland parts of Coast, Eastern, North Eastern and Rift Valley Provinces in dry bushland and thickets. Agroclimatic Zones IV–VI.

USES: Firewood, tool handles, edible fruit (sparingly), medicine (leaves, roots) fodder (leaves for goats and camels), bee forage, arrows.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings.

REMARKS: This is a common shrub in dry country. It is, however, very variable.

Most of the other 7 or so species of *Premna* in Kenya have a more limited distribution. Of interest is *P. angolensis* (**Luhya:** Mungalikuru), which can grow to tree size. In this species, leaves are in 4s. The species occurs in Kakamega Forest in forest margins and clearings, but is rare. *P. maxima* (**Meru:** Muchichio) can also grow to a tree over 20 m in height. It is a tree of moist evergreen forest found only in Meru and Marsabit and also rare. Leaves are opposite or in 3s. Both species are hardwoods with good timber. *P. chrysoclada* (**Digo:** Mvuma; **Giriama:** Mvuma nyuki, Mvuma; **Kamba:** Mukaakaa; **Pokomo:** Mukirikonko; **Swahili:** Mvuma nyuki) is a coastal shrub or a small tree with opposite leaves and a dense flower head. Uses are similar to those of *P. resinosa*. Members of this genus tend to have very hard wood, which finds many uses in the household. *Premna* is a genus with several dozen species found from Africa to the Pacific Ocean islands and Australia.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996.

