

**Rauvolfia caffra**

## Apocynaceae

**Indigenous**

**COMMON NAMES:** **English:** Quinine tree; **Kikuyu:** Mutongo, Mwerere; **Kipsigis:** Rerendet; **Kisii:** Omumure; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumunandebe; **Luo:** Obokeran, Ogandi; **Maasai:** Olemudongo; **Meru:** Mutuu; **Swahili:** Mkufi, Mwembe mwitu; **Taveta:** Mbariabari; **Tharaka:** Mukinduri munene.

**DESCRIPTION:** A much-branched evergreen tree up to 35 m high with a straight bole reaching 1.5 m in diameter and with a leafy, spreading crown. The tree resembles mango but is more oval and less dense, branches often whorled. **BARK:** Light brown or greyish white with irregular fissures. **LEAVES:** Thinly leathery, arranged in whorls of 3–5 towards the ends of branchlets, shiny, dark green above, 6–32 cm long and 1.5–7.5 cm wide, tip drawn out. If removed, thin white latex drips out. **FLOWERS:** Small, white, tubular, sweet scented, in large dense clusters, to 20 cm across. **FRUIT:** Rounded and smooth, about 1.3 cm across, green at first, changing to blackish purple and wrinkled when ripe, 1–2-seeded.

**ECOLOGY:** Widely distributed in Africa from Ghana in the west to Kenya and south to South Africa. In Kenya, Tanzania and southern Africa it is found in riverine *Brachystegia* woodland, lowland forests, dry and wet montane forests; 0–2,100 m, rainfall 500–1,300 mm. It is a characteristic feature of areas where there is a high groundwater table. Agroclimatic Zones II–III.

**USES:** Firewood, timber, furniture (stools), beehives, utensils (grain mortars), medicine (bark, roots), bee forage, shade (in coffee), ornamental, veterinary medicine.

**PROPAGATION:** Easily grown from seedlings, wildings or cuttings. Produces root suckers.

**SEED:** 4,500–5,000 seeds per kg.

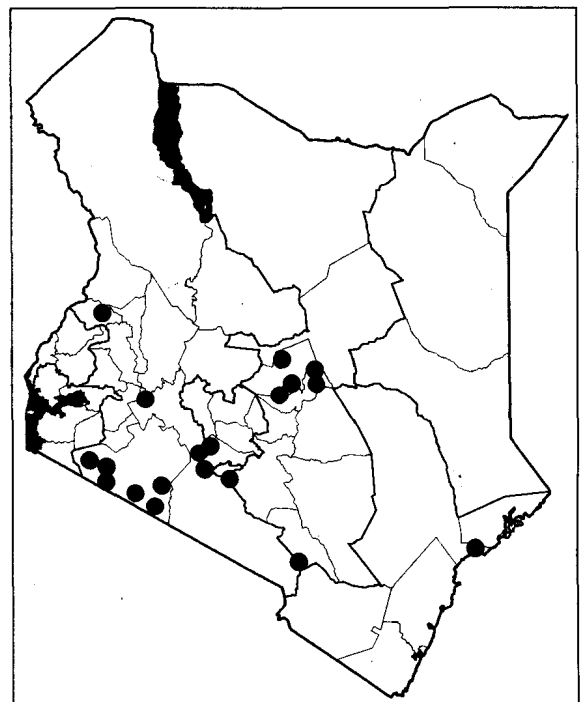
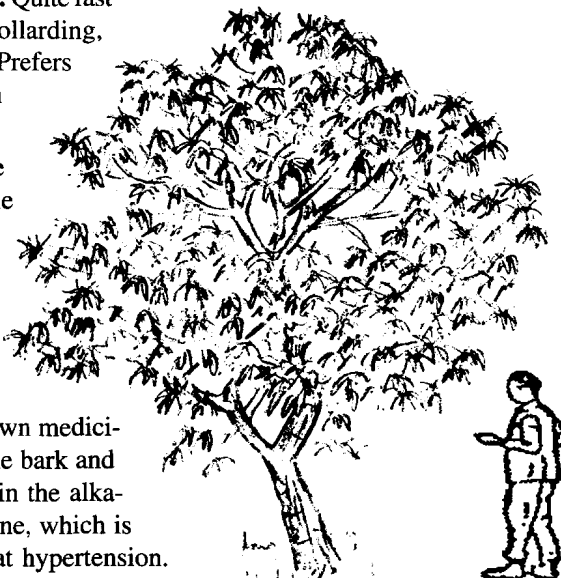
**treatment:** Remove fruit pulp and wash with water before sowing. Sow in a seedbed and prick out at the 3-leaf stage. Germination is fast and good; up to 80% after 2 weeks.

**storage:** Can retain viability for only a short period (1 month) at room temperature.

**MANAGEMENT:** Quite fast growing; pollarding, coppicing. Prefers shade when young.

**REMARKS:** The wood is pale and light and very suitable for carving utensils and curios.

A well-known medicinal tree. The bark and roots contain the alkaloid reserpine, which is used to treat hypertension.



The English name 'quinine tree' refers to the bitter and supposedly quinine-like properties of the bark.

Two other species of *Rauvolfia* occur in Kenya. *R. mannii* (**Kamba:** Musua ndui; **Kikuyu:** Munieria, Mutongo; **Taita:** Mamapemba, Msasa) is found in Taita, Kitui and the central Kenya highlands at forest margins and in disturbed areas. It is a shrub or small tree distinguished from the other species by the long narrow end to the leaves and a short (2–5 mm) flower head. Fruits are red to purplish black. *R. mombasiana* (**Boni:** Kihere; **Malakote:** Lupiki; **Swahili:** Mti sumu) is found in Coast Province in riverine thicket and at forest edges. It is an evergreen shrub or small tree with greenish white flowers and orange-red fruits. Its bark is used as rat poison.

**FURTHER READING:** <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; ITDG and IIRR, 1996; Katende et al., 1995; Kokwaro, 1993; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Storrs, 1979; van Wyk, 1993.