

Rauvolfia caffra

Apocynaceae

Indigenous

Common names: **Bende:** mhetwefwe; **Chag:** msesewe; **Eng:** quinine tree; **Gogo:** mkongo; Hehe: muveriveri; **Lugu:** mlolo; **Maasai:** olchapukalyan, oljabokaryan; **Meru:** msesewe, oltawakalyan; Nguu: mlengwelengwe; **Nyak:** mpugupugu; **Rangi:** msumai; **Samb:** ng'weeti; **Swan:** mkufi, mwembemwitu.

Ecology: Widely distributed in riverine *Brachystegia* woodland, lowland forests, dry and wet montane forests of the highlands of eastern and southern Africa, 500-2,100 m. It is a characteristic feature of areas where there is ground water.

Uses: Firewood, timber, utensils (grain mortars), beehives, flavouring (bark, for beer), medicine (bark, roots), bee forage, shade (in coffee), ornamental.

Description: A much-branched evergreen tree up to 35 m high with a straight bole reaching 1.5 m diameter and with a leafy, spreading crown. **It 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.

Propagation: Easily grown from seedlings, wildings.

Seed info.: No. of seeds per kg: 4,500-5,000. Germination is fast and good, up to 80% after two weeks.

treatment: not necessary.

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

Management: Pollarding. It transplants well and is quite fast growing.

Remarks: It is already used in the highlands in coffee/banana fields. The wood is pale and light and very suitable for carving utensils and curios. A well-known medicinal tree: bark and roots contain the alkaloid reserpine which is used in the treatment of hypertension.

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