

**Rhus tenuinervis****Anacardiaceae****Indigenous**

**COMMON NAMES:** **Kamba:** Mutheu, Kitheu; **Maasai:** Olmisigiyo.

**DESCRIPTION:** A shrub or small tree to 6 m, usually 2.5–4 m.

**Branches twiggy**, some thorn-like. **LEAVES:** Small, with 3 softly hairy leaflets. **Leaflet edges sparsely toothed towards the tip.** **FLOWERS:** Greenish yellow, small, borne on a branched flowering head. **FRUIT:** Small, to 7 mm long, **angled, compressed, green, turning brownish yellow** on ripening.

**ECOLOGY:** Occurs from Ethiopia and Sudan south to South Africa. In Kenya mainly found in Kitui, Mbeere, Machakos and Kajiado Districts (locally very common in Machakos and Kajiado) in *Combretum* bushland and bushed grassland, 900–1,850 m. Thrives in semi-arid areas with sandy soil, red clay or black-cotton soil; rainfall 500–800 mm. Agroclimatic Zones IV–V. In full flower in May in Machakos District.

**USES:** Firewood, charcoal, edible fruit, medicine, fodder (leaves), shade, dye (bark of the root), live fence, dead fence, toothbrushes.

**PROPAGATION:** Easy to raise from seed. Produces suckers when cut.

**SEED:**

**treatment:** Not necessary.

**MANAGEMENT:** Prune lower branches and remove unnecessary stems in multi-stemmed plants.

**REMARKS:** Fruits eaten mainly by children and have an appealing sweet–acid taste. Young shoots and leaves are sour and are chewed like *khat* (*Catha edulis*), the juice being swallowed and the rest discarded (Maasai, Kikuyu). The trunk produces intense heat when burned, hence used by blacksmiths (Kamba). Branches cut and stuck into the ground in a row to form a fence (Kamba). Toothbrushes (Maasai, Kamba). Provides good shade, but often harbours hairy caterpillars at certain seasons.

*R. ruspolii* (**Embu:** Mushishuna; **Kikuyu:** Muthigio; **Sabaot:** Njowaruwa; **Tugen:** Sirwa, Siwopyoyon) is a shrub or tree to 5 m found mainly in highland areas, at dry forest margins and in evergreen bushland from the central highlands to north-western Kenya, 1,500–2,400 m. Leaves and flowering parts are bigger than those of *R. tenuinervis*. Leaflets are up to 18 cm long, softly hairy

with a rounded tip, edge sparsely toothed towards the tip. Flowers yellow, in long heads (up to 28 cm). Fruits 3–4 mm long.

**FURTHER READING:** Beentje, 1994; Maundu et al., 1999; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002.

