

Rhus vulgaris

Anacardiaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Digo:** Mbwana nyahi, Mbwanyahi; **Embu:** Muthigi; **Kamba:** Mutheu, Mutheu munene, Kitheu, Ntheu (fruit); **Kikuyu:** Muthigio; **Kipsigis:** Suriat, Munjorriat; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Busangura busecha (fruit), Kumusangura kumusecha (plant); **Luhya (Tachoni):** Obusangura (fruit), Omusangura (plant); **Luo:** Sangla madhako (Migori), Sangla maduong (South Nyanza), Awayo (Siaya); **Maasai:** Ormungushi, Olmungushi, Olmisigiyo, Ilmisigiyo (plural), Emungushi, Engarani; **Mbeere:** Mubebiaiciya, Muthanguta, Mutheru, Muthigiyo, Muthiigi; **Meru:** Mirimuthu, Mirimamuthua, Muthigi; **Nandi:** Monjorrioyat; **Pokot:** Siriewo kaptamu; **Sabaot:** Njowaruwa; **Samburu:** Sioloran, Lejoro; **Swahili:** Mlishangwe, Mlama mwitu, Mkono chuma, Mrinja kondo; **Taita:** Mkungu, Seria; **Teso:** Ekwatet, Ekwayu, Epwatet.

DESCRIPTION: A shrub or small tree that occasionally reaches 6 m. **BARK:** Branchlets brown, hairy, young stems green. **LEAVES:** With 3 leaflets, which are usually densely hairy underneath, entire, occasionally toothed towards the tip, the middle leaflet usually larger than lateral ones, leaf stalk to 4 cm, very variable. **FLOWERS:** Small, round, in hairy branched heads, to 20 cm long, yellow-green, with bright yellow stamens. **FRUIT:** Small, green at first, turning reddish brown when mature, almost round but slightly flattened when dry, up to 6 mm across, acidic, edible.

ECOLOGY: Range extends from Cameroon in West Africa to Ethiopia and south to Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Widespread in Kenya, e.g. in the Chyulu Hills, Mt Elgon, Ngong Hills, Thui Hill (Makueni), Kitui Hills, Chepareria (West Pokot), in bushland (usually disturbed), 800–2,700 m. Soils vary—clay, sandy or rocky. Rainfall 700–1,500 mm. Agroclimatic Zones II–III. Flowers in January–April and fruits in March–June in Bungoma.

USES: Firewood, posts, farm implements, tool handles, edible fruit, medicine (roots, seeds), fodder (goats and game eat the leaves), ornamental, mulch, live fence, dead fence (cut stems), toothbrushes, veterinary medicine, wedges made from stem for enlarging ear-lobe holes.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings.

SEED:

storage: Remains viable only about 3 months at room temperature.

MANAGEMENT: Trimming if grown for fence; coppicing, pruning to reduce shade. Generally a slow grower. Once pruned, it sends out new straight shoots.

REMARKS: The fruits are small, but large quantities are produced. They have a sweetish acid taste. The species is widely accepted in cultivated fields in Bungoma and is widespread along boundaries and as a live fence.

FURTHER READING: Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Dharani, 2002; ITDG and IIRR, 1996; Katende et al., 1999; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002.

