

Ricinus communis

Euphorbiaceae

Indigenous to Africa

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Kobor; **Digo:** Mwono; **Embu:** Mwariki; **English:** Castor oil plant; **Giriama:** M'bono; **Ilchamus:** Mobonu; **Kamba:** Kivunu, Kyaiki, Mwaiki; **Kikuyu:** Mwariki; **Kipsigis:** Menuet, Imanek; **Kisii:** Omobono; **Luhya:** Libono, Mubonebone; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumubono; **Luo:** Odagwa, Obala ndagwa; **Maasai:** Oldule, Orpaliki; **Marakwet:** Manwa; **Meru:** Mwariki; **Orma:** Koboo; **Pokot:** Pondon; **Rendille:** Fololo; **Samburu:** Laibelelhi, Lampalegi; **Somali:** Gitkalat; **Swahili:** Bonoo, Mbariki; **Taita:** Mbonu; **Turkana:** Ebune.

DESCRIPTION: An evergreen shrub or tree to 5 m. **Stems often red**, hollow with age, well-marked leaf nodes and leaf scars. **LEAVES:** Large compound **palmate leaves to 50 cm across** with **5–11 lobes**, the **edge toothed**, on a long hollow leaf stalk. Young leaves soft, shiny, dark red-green above. **FLOWERS:** Crowded on upright spikes to 60 cm, male flowers with **creamy-yellow stamens** at the base; female flowers with soft green spines and 3 bright red divided stigmas at the top. **FRUIT:** Round, **green-brown capsules**, spiny, to 2.5 cm across, split to set free **3 seeds**, grey-purple-brown, shiny and spotted with a small white structure (caruncle) at one end.

ECOLOGY: A genus with only one species (but many different varieties), probably indigenous to tropical Africa, but now cultivated and often wild in most tropical and many temperate countries. In Kenya, it grows over a wide range of altitudes and habitats, preferring humus-rich and disturbed ground, especially along streams, 500–2,100 m. Widely cultivated and sometimes regenerates naturally in secondary scrub and gaps in forests. Agroclimatic Zones II–III.

USES: Medicine (roots, stems, oil from leaves, oil from seed), castor oil (from seed, for technical uses), tannin (used in Baringo), soil conservation, river-bank stabilization, veterinary medicine.

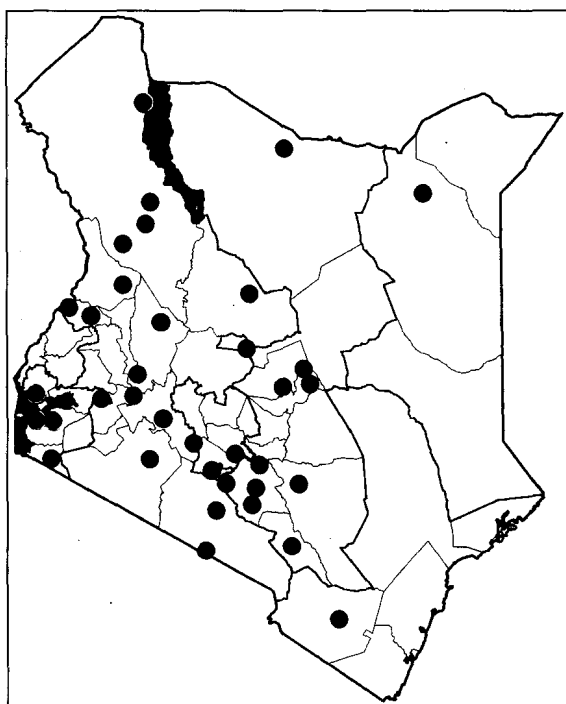
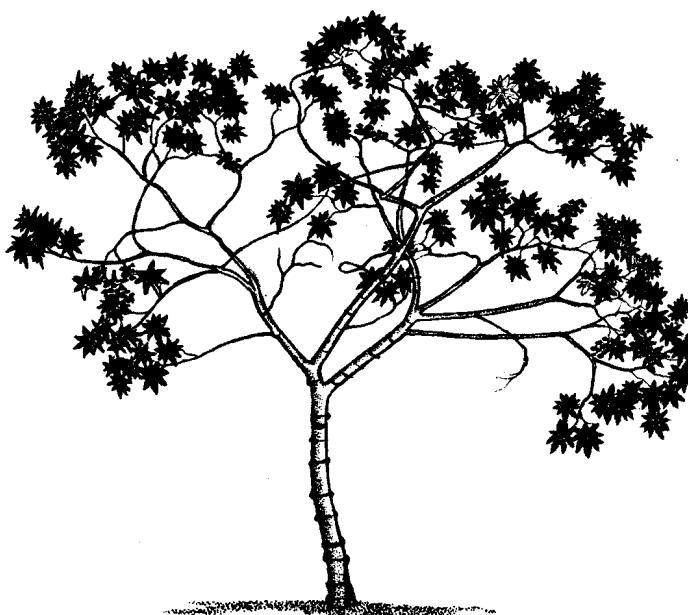
PROPAGATION: Seedlings, direct sowing at site.

SEED: Collect mature fruits before they split open. About 1,300 seeds per kg.

treatment: Not necessary. Germination is very good and fast, about 90% after 3 weeks.

storage: Seed can be stored for long periods (2–3 years).

MANAGEMENT: A fast-growing but short-lived plant. Can be grown as a fallow plant and on croplands. Often found in homesteads.



Ricinus communis (cont)

REMARKS: The plant is drought and termite resistant. The seed coat and leaves are poisonous to animals and to poultry, and even the oil residue can be used only as stock feed if specially treated. It is, however, good as an organic manure. The seeds yield up to 50% oil, an oil that has many industrial uses. For medicinal purposes, the oil extract must be heated to neutralize the strong poison, ricin. Even a few seeds can kill if they are chewed—so

take care with children. The oil is good as a body lotion but it has also been widely used as a purgative. The Pokot have used it for tanning leather.

FURTHER READING: Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Blundell, 1987; Dharani, 2002; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; ITDG and IIRR, 1996; Katende et al., 1995; Kokwaro, 1993; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989.

