

Strychnos mitis

Loganiaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Karaa; **Kikuyu:** Mutikani; **Kipsigis:** Mase; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumukhubwe; **Maasai:** Olduyesi; **Samburu:** Itagurmut; **Swahili:** Mwanga jini ndogo; **Tugen:** Turukukwa.

DESCRIPTION: An evergreen forest tree to 24 m tall, occasionally more, the trunk usually crooked, with low branches and a spreading crown, trunks appearing twisted (like *Eucalyptus*). The dense leafy crown resembles that of *Cynometra*. The base may be thick and fluted but there are no buttresses. **BARK:** Grey-brown, **very thin and smooth**, slightly flaking with age, underbark often green. **LEAVES:** Opposite, stiff, shiny above, **long oval 4–11 cm long, tip usually pointed, a short stalk**. All *Strychnos* have 3 veins from the base, but the lateral vein in this species is faint, **the pair above are much clearer, about 1 cm from the base**. **FLOWERS:** White-cream, **small and hairy, in dense heads, only 1.2 cm**, usually terminal, but also beside leaves. **FRUIT:** Yellow-orange, rounded to oval, 1–2 cm in diameter; eaten by baboons.

ECOLOGY: A forest tree common in tropical rainforest throughout eastern Africa; also in Sudan and Zimbabwe. In Kenya, it occurs in dry or riverine forests up to 2,000 m. Agroclimatic Zones II–III.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, timber (heavy construction, rail sleepers), poles, shade, ornamental, avenue tree.

PROPAGATION: Regenerates naturally from seed in profuse numbers. Wildings, direct sowing at site, seedlings.

SEED: Fruit are produced all year round. These are collected, seeds extracted and thoroughly dried.

treatment: Soak in water overnight before sowing.

storage: Store in sealed containers in a cool place.

MANAGEMENT: Pollarding and coppicing.

REMARKS: The timber is hard and difficult to work but used for building and heavy construction. Several other *Strychnos* species are useful. One is *S. madagascariensis* (**Boni:** Mangula; **Chonyi:** Mkwakwa; **Digo:** Muhonga, Musikiro, Mkwakwa; **Giriama:** Mujaje, Majaje (fruit), Mkwakwa; **Kamba:** Kikolakolania; **Kambe:** Mkwakwa;

Sanya: Korocha, Mangula; **Swahili:** Mtonga, Kikwakwa), a much-branched shrub or small tree to 6 m high with pale grey bark and large fruits, to 8 cm across, green with a hard cover, turning orange-yellow on ripening; edible and can be made into juice, but seeds should be discarded. Seeds are not as many as in *S. spinosa*. It is found at the coast and inland to Makueni District in coastal bushland, on rocky hillsides and thickets, 0–700 m. Propagated by seed, good germination. Another related species, *S. innocua*, usually with smaller fruits, 4–7 cm in diameter, has been found only in West Pokot District. The deep yellow ripe fruit is edible.

FURTHER READING: Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Katende et al., 1995; Maundu et al., 1999 (*S. innocua*); Mbuya et al., 1994 (*S. innocua*); Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002 (*S. innocua*); Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990 (*S. innocua*).

