

Thevetia peruviana

Apocynaceae

Central and South America

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Yellow oleander, Peruvian thevetia;
Luo: Cha mama.

DESCRIPTION: A multi-stemmed shrub or shady tree to 4 m.

LEAVES: Shiny, narrow, in spirals around the stem, about 10 cm long. **FLOWERS:** Yellow, white or salmon, in narrow trumpets, petals twisted in bud, to 6 cm long, the green base extending to the trumpet edge.

FRUIT: Fleshy, 4-angled to rounded, about 3 cm across, stalked, with a flat triangular nut inside.

ECOLOGY: A bush or small tree, it is widely planted in the tropics as an attractive hedge or ornamental bush. It tolerates most soils but prefers sandy ones. Commonly used as a hedge in many areas of Kenya. Agroclimatic Zones III–V.

USES: Medicine (seed), shade, ornamental, soil conservation, live fence.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, cuttings.

SEED: About 300 seeds per kg; good germination rate of 80%.

treatment: Not necessary.

storage: Seed can be stored for up to 3 months.

MANAGEMENT: Fast growing; prune about 1 month before the rains to induce flowering. Trim if grown as a fence.

REMARKS: Commonly used as a hedge in Nyanza, Kitui, Taveta and coastal lowlands. The species has become a weed in the Tana River area. All parts of this shrub are poisonous and it is not touched as fodder even by goats. Take care with children! A drug used in the treatment of congestive heart failure is extracted from the nuts, and thevetin, obtained from the bark, has been used for production of a powerful antipyretic. These medicinal properties have been commercially explored in, for example, the USA. As the plant is very poisonous, however, any use for these medicinal properties should be based on sufficient experience and knowledge.

Another species, *T. thevetioides*, is a tree to 8 m with larger yellow flowers to 12 cm across, fruit to 6 cm, rounded on a long stalk. It is cultivated as an ornamental from the coast to the highlands and is common in Nairobi.

FURTHER READING: Dharani, 2002; Katende et al., 1995; Lötschert and Beese, 1983; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989.

