

## *Vitex doniana*

Verbenaceae

Indigenous

**English:** Black plum  
**Nyanja:** Mfifya, mfutu  
**Senga:** Mufito, mfutu

**Ecology:** A woodland tree, the tallest and most common of several *Vitex* species found throughout Africa from the Sahel to South Africa, 0–1,800 m. It grows in most parts of Zambia, an occasional tree of evergreen thicket to open woodlands both in the valleys and on the plateau. It prefers a high water-table.

**Uses:** Firewood, charcoal, **timber** (construction, furniture), poles, **food** (fruit), medicine (bark, leaves, roots, fruit), fodder (leaves, fruit), bee forage, shade, dye (bark).

**Description:** A semi-deciduous tree, 8–15 m, with a **heavy rounded crown** and a clear bole. **BARK:** rather smooth and pale at first, finely grooved, later darker with large scales. **LEAVES:** compound and **opposite, the 5 finger-like leaflets** held up on a **stalk to 15 cm**, the 2 lowest leaflets smaller, each one wide and oblong to 14 cm, shortly stalked, pale grey-green below, leathery. **FLOWERS:** fragrant, in dense bunches to 12 cm across on a long stalk; each flower bell-shaped, hairy inside, **cream but one larger lobe hairy, blue-violet**, August–January. **FRUIT:** **oblong-round to 3 cm**, black when ripe, thin flesh around a very hard nut which contains 1–4 seeds. A conspicuous calyx remains around the fruit and curls back, April–August.

**Propagation:** Seedlings, direct seeding, wildings, cuttings.

**Seed:** No. of nuts per kg: 900–1,300. Each nut contains several seeds.

**treatment:** Remove fleshy part of the fruit and soak nut in cold water for 24 hours.

**storage:** Sow fresh for best germination results.

**Management:** Coppicing, lopping.

**Remarks:** The species regenerates naturally by seed and root suckers and then grows fairly fast. The tree produces a teak-like timber and edible fruits. The fruits may be picked when green and allowed to ripen in storage. The wood is suitable for furniture, carvings and boat building. The roots are used to treat gonorrhoea, jaundice, leprosy, dysentery and enhance fertility. Cultivation of this tree should be encouraged.

