## Vitex keniensis Verbenaceae

## **Indigenous**

STANDARD/TRADE NAME: Meru oak, Kenya oak.

COMMON NAMES: English: Meru oak; Kikuyu: Muhuru; Meru: Muuru.

DESCRIPTION: A tall deciduous tree to 35 m with a heavy rounded crown and a clear, straight bole. BARK: Grey to pale brown with narrow vertical fissures, dark brown with age. LEAVES: Compound, digitate (like fingers), with 5 leaflets, up to 25 cm long on a long hairy stalk. Leaflets widest at the middle and often unequal at the base; light green and sandpapery above, pale green and densely hairy beneath, largest leaflet to 21 cm long. FLOWERS: Small, to 8 mm long, borne on loose, branched side heads, to 18 cm long, creamy white, each flower with one large prominent mauve petal. FRUIT: Nearly rounded, about 1.5 cm long, black when ripe, the hairy calyx remaining. Each fruit with one stone. Black ripe fruits fall to the ground.

Ecology: A Kenyan tree occurring in a restricted range from 1,300 to 2,100 m on the eastern slopes of Mt Kenya (Meru) and possibly in Ngangao forest, Taita. Prefers deep red to sandy-loam soils. Agroclimatic Zones II–III. Fruits in October around Mt Kenya. Flowers in December and January in Nairobi.

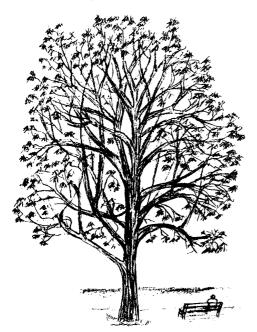
Uses: Firewood, timber (high quality), poles, furniture, veneer, panelling, edible fruit, ornamental, windbreak, shade.

Propagation: Seedlings, wildings.

SEED: The tree produces plenty of seed. Germination rate about 50%. About 2,500 stones per kg. Each fruit has one large stone, which bears 1–4 seeds (multi-germ). **treatment:** Not necessary, but soaking in cold water improves germination.

storage: Preferable to use fresh seed.

Management: Prune to get a clear bole. Several seedlings may germinate from one stone. Can be separated and pricked out. Coppicing.



**REMARKS:** The tree has become rare due to over-exploitation; planting should be encouraged. The timber is hard and durable, pale yellow to light brown with darker heartwood and a wavy grain. The fruits are eaten only in emergency; not as good as those of *V. doniana*.

FURTHER READING: http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/ TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm; Albrecht, 1993; Beentje, 1994; Dharani, 2002; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989.

