

Vitex mombassae

Verbenaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Boni:** Mkalijote, Mogalishat; **Chonyi:** Mfudu madzi, Fudu (fruit); **Digo:** Mfudu madzi; **Sanya:** Mkufu; **Somali:** Marfis; **Swahili:** Mfudu maji.

DESCRIPTION: A small deciduous tree or shrub, usually 3–6 m, occasionally to 10 m. **BARK:** Light grey, fissured longitudinally. Younger stems rusty hairy. **LEAVES:** Opposite, each with 3–5 leaflets, usually 5, terminal leaflet 4–12 cm. Leaflets widest at the middle or towards the tip, **usually without a stalk**. Softly hairy, more so beneath, where it is rusty hairy. **Leaf buds with short brown hairs.** **FLOWERS:** Few on side-branched flowering heads, white or pale blue to mauve, small to 8–14 mm, each with 5 unequal lobes, middle lower lobe largest and mauve. Borne in dense heads with a long, common stalk arising beside leaves. **FRUIT:** Usually in bunches, each nearly round, to 3 cm long, green, turning **brownish black to black** and soft skinned on ripening, **clasped by green calyx lobes that enlarge on fruit**. Fruit has one large hard stone.

ECOLOGY: Found in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya south to South Africa. In Kenya, limited to Mombasa, Shimba Hills, Gazi and elsewhere at the coast in bushland and wooded grassland, 0–450 m. Prefers well-aerated soils, usually in sandy soils. Rainfall 850–1,000 mm. Agroclimatic Zones II–IV. Flowers in March and September–October in Kwale and Kilifi.

USES: Firewood, poles, tool handles, utensils (wooden spoons), pestles, edible fruit, shade, ornamental, bee forage.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings.

SEED: Each stone has 1–4 seeds (multi-germ).

treatment: Not necessary, but soaking in cold water improves germination.

storage: Preferable to use fresh seed.

REMARKS: The tree may be common locally. Fruits are more watery than those of *V. payos*, hence the local names. They are said to be sold in central and southern Tanzania. This species is closely allied to *V. ferruginea* (**Boni:**

Mkalijote, Mogalishat; **Chonyi:** Mfudu madzi, Fudu madzi (fruit); **Digo:** Mfudu; **Giriama:** Mfudu madzi; **Sanya:** Muki ku'faa; **Somali:** Marfis; **Swahili:** Mgegi), a small deciduous shrub or tree of coastal bushland. In *V. ferruginea* leaflets are hairless or velvety rusty hairy below. The fruit is up to 3.5 cm long, green, turning brownish black on ripening. It is also edible. Fruits found from December to January. The wood of the two species is popular for making household utensils.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Maundu et al., 1999; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979.

