

Vitex payos

Verbenaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Chonyi:** Mfudu unga, Fudu unga (fruit); **Digo:** Mfudu; **Embu:** Muburu, Mburu (fruit); **English:** Black plum; **Giriama:** Mfudu; **Kamba:** Kimuu, Muu (fruit); **Kambe:** Mfudu unga, Fudu unga (fruit); **Mbeere:** Muburu; **Meru:** Muuru; **Swahili:** Mfudu, Mfufu.

DESCRIPTION: A small deciduous tree to 8 m high with a low, sparsely branched, rounded crown and square branchlets. **BARK:** Grey-brown, **deeply fissured**. Younger stems with a rusty, woolly bark. **LEAVES:** Opposite, each with **5 leaflets**, occasionally 3, terminal leaflet 7–20 cm. Leaflets usually widest towards the tip, occasionally without a stalk but the larger leaflets sometimes with a winged stalk, roughly hairy above, softly hairy beneath. **Young leaflets densely hairy**, especially beneath. **FLOWERS:** Small, to 6 mm, with 5 unequal-lobed, middle lower lobe largest. Borne in dense heads with a long common stalk arising beside leaves, white, pale blue or mauve, fragrant. **FRUIT:** Usually in bunches, each shortly cylindrical, to 2.5 cm, **clashed by a persistent calyx cup**, green, **dotted with lenticels**, turning **brownish black to black** and soft skinned on ripening. Stone hard, grooved.

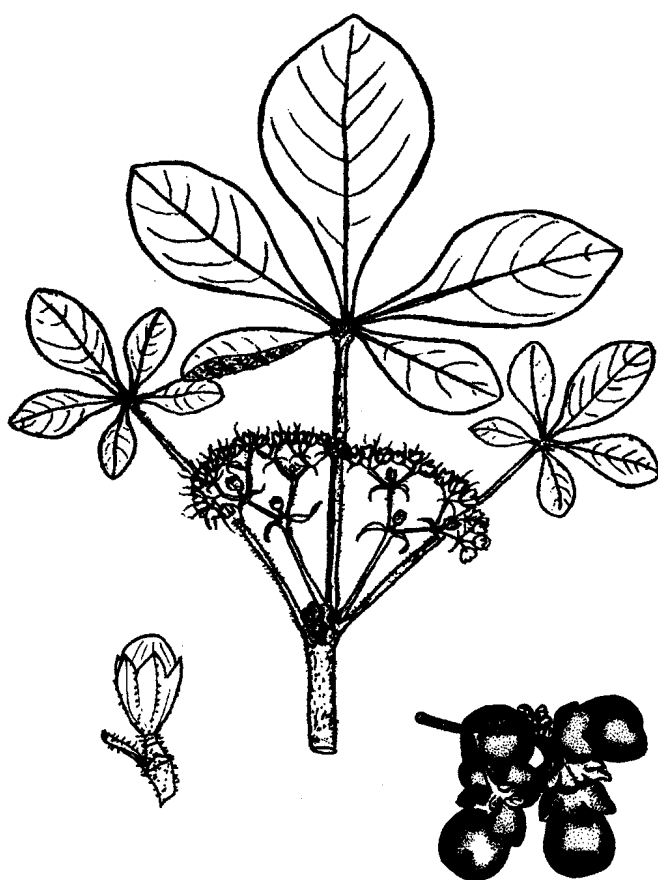
ECOLOGY: Found in Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi. In Kenya, it grows, for example, in Kitui, Embu, Machakos, Kilifi and Kwale in hot, low and semi-arid areas, in wooded grassland, 0–1,600 m. Prefers well-aerated soils, often in sandy soils, less often red and rocky ones. Associated with steep rocky areas. May flower when leafless and may produce profusely. Rainfall: 650–850 mm. Agroclimatic Zones III–IV. Flowers in November–December in Machakos, Makueni and Embu, in March and September–October in Kwale and Kilifi. Fruits in April–June in Kitui, Makueni and Embu.

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

PROPAGATION: Seedlings. The seeds do not germinate easily and wildings are difficult to find.

REMARKS: The ripe fruit has a black pulp that is mealy, sweet and edible. The fruit is sold in some markets in Eastern Province such as in Kitui, Mutomo and Ishiara. Ripening is accelerated by covering mature green fruits in ash (Kamba). Dry stems are very hard, but snap under tension. Straight trunks used for poles. The tree may be common locally and is very attractive when in full bloom. A related species, *V. fischeri* (**Kuria:** Omuhuruhuru; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumufutumbwe; **Luhya:** Mufutumwe; **Luo:** Jwelu), also has edible, purplish black fruits but they are smaller, to 12 mm. This tree, to 15 m, occurs only in western Kenya, e.g. in Nyanza, Western Province and around Mt Elgon. The wood of the two species is popular for making household utensils.

FURTHER READING: Backes and Ahenda, 1998 (*V. fischeri*); Beentje, 1994; Maundu et al., 1999; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979.



Ripe fruit

