

Ximenia americana

Olacaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Bajun:** Mchundakula; **Boran:** Uda, Odda, Dabobes; **Chonyi:** Mtundukula; **Digo:** Mtundukula; **English:** False sandalwood, Sour plum, Tallow nut; **Giriama:** Mtundukula, Tundukula (fruit); **Ilchamus:** Lama; **Kamba:** Mutula, Ndula (fruit); **Kambe:** Mtundukula; **Kikuyu:** Mutura; **Luhya:** Muruli; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumutuli; **Luo:** Olemo (red fruit), Olemb ochok (yellow fruit); **Maasai:** Olamai, Engamai, Ilama (plural); **Malakote:** Huda hudo; **Marakwet:** Kunyat, Kunyotwo (plural); **Mbeere:** Mutuura; **Meru:** Muthoroma, Ndoroma (fruit); **Orma:** Huda hudo; **Pokot:** Kinyotwo, Kinyat (plural); **Sabaot:** Mutoywo, Uluteywa; **Samburu:** Lamai; **Sanya:** Hudahuda; **Somali:** Murcud, Mandurcet; **Swahili:** Mtundukula, Mpingi; **Taita:** Mtundukula, Ndundukula (fruit), Mtagashiko; **Teso:** Olimu, Elamai; **Tharaka:** Muroroma; **Turkana:** Elamai.

DESCRIPTION: A spreading, usually spiny shrub, occasionally scrambling, or a small tree, to 4 m high (but sometimes to 7 m in var. *caffra*). Spines to 1 cm, thin and straight, leaves and branches with or without hairs. **BARK:** Brown-black and scaly. **LEAVES:** Alternate, simple, often in tufts on short shoots, oblong, to 6 cm long, blue-green (var. *americana*) to yellow-green, hairless to softly hairy, tip round or notched. **FLOWERS:** Very fragrant, small green-white in small branched clusters with a common stalk. **FRUIT:** Oval to 3 cm, shiny, thin skinned, light green, turning yellow, orange or pink-red on ripening. **Flesh sour** but refreshing. One large yellow-brown seed with up to 60% oil.

ECOLOGY: A species with a pan-tropical distribution found in tropical America, Africa and Asia. Common throughout the African savanna. In Kenya, found from the coast to Nyanza, Rift Valley and northern areas in open sandy woodland (Coast), stony slopes (Rift Valley) and scattered thorn bush in semi-arid zones, 0–2,000 m. Agroclimatic Zones IV–V. Flowers in October–February and fruits in December–February in Bungoma. At the coast, seeds are collected in July–August.

USES: Firewood, rafters, poles, beams, tool handles, utensils, edible fruit, medicine (fruits, leaves, roots), fodder (leaves in the dry season), bee forage, ornamental, shade, tannin (bark, roots), dye (bark, roots), live fence, oil (seed, heartwood), veterinary medicine; fruits are oily and, threaded onto sticks, are used as candles.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings.

SEED: About 1,400 seeds per kg; 50–60% germination.

treatment: Not necessary.

storage: Seed cannot be stored for long periods. Sow fresh seed for good germination (recalcitrant seed).

MANAGEMENT: Slow growing; pruning, coppicing. Trim if grown as a fence.

REMARKS: This is a very variable species. Variation is more marked in hairiness and shape of leaves, fruit colour and thorniness. Two varieties are, however, recognized in eastern Africa: var. *americana* tends to be more shrubby and has less hairy leaves and young branches than var. *caffra*. It is mainly found at the coast, northern Rift Valley and around the Lake Victoria region. Fruits tend to be orange when ripe. Var. *caffra* is more widely

distributed. Leaves and young twigs are more hairy, velvety in some types, and fruits tend to be yellow when ripe. The taxonomy of this species is, however, still unclear. A useful tree for arid and semi-arid areas. The oil from the kernels is suitable for soap and lubrication, and has also been used as body and hair oil and for softening leather (Pokot). The oil is strongly purgative. The wood is heavy, hard and very durable. Leaves contain sambunigrine, a biocide that kills the snail vectors of schistosomiasis.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Katende et al., 1995, 1999; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979; Verheij and Coronel, 1991; von Maydell, 1990.

