

Zanthoxylum usambarense (Fagara usambarensis)

Rutaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Kamba:** Muvuu, Mulasi, Muvulu; **Kikuyu:** Muguchwa, Muheheti (Nyeri); **Kipsigis:** Sagawaita; **Luo:** Roko; **Maasai:** Oloisugi; **Meru:** Mugucua; **Samburu:** Loisugi.

DESCRIPTION: A much-branched shrub or tree, usually 5–8 m high, occasionally up to 14 m, often multi-stemmed and rather straggling, with a **spreading crown and drooping branches**. **BARK:** Greyish brown, **deeply fissured** branchlets with straight or slightly upcurved dark red prickles. **LEAVES:** Compound, to 24 cm long, with 5–17 leaflets; leaflets very variable, generally oval, up to 5 cm long, with **translucent gland dots** (seen when looked at against the sun), **margin toothed, midrib and stalks dark red** and thorny, very strongly aromatic when crushed, hot to taste. **FLOWERS:** Cream, small, in much-branched terminal heads 10–15 cm long. **FRUITS:** Paired, about 1 cm across, round, sharply tipped, red, breaking open to release **shiny blue-black seeds**.

ECOLOGY: Occurs in Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Kenya. In Kenya, found in highland zones, especially in dry forest or its remnants such as secondary bushland or bushed grassland. Found, e.g. in Nairobi (Karen), Narok (Loita), Kiambu, Kericho and Samburu, 1,400–2,500 m. Common at about 2,000 m. Agroclimatic Zones III–IV. Flowers in June and fruits in October in Narok and Kajiado.

USES: Timber (house construction), furniture, bows, medicine (bark, leaves and root), live fence, toothbrushes (twigs).

PROPAGATION: Seedlings.

SEED: Seeds should be sown immediately.

treatment: Not required.

storage: Use fresh seed.

MANAGEMENT: Prune and guide branches to control growth.

REMARKS: Twigs used as toothbrushes but have a hot taste. Leaves are usually smaller and less scented than those of *Z. chalybeum*.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Noad and Birnie, 1989.

