

Ziziphus abyssinica

Rhamnaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Abyssinian jujube, Catch thorn; **Gabra:** K'urk'uura; **Kamba:** Muae, Kitolosuu (Kitui); **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumwikalangwe, Kumukomboti; **Luo:** Lang'o; **Mbeere:** Mugagu; **Meru:** Thilarii; **Pokot:** Tirak (plural), Ngowin; **Sabaot:** Katagi; **Teso:** Ekodokodoi; **Turkana:** Esilant, Esilang'.

DESCRIPTION: A thorny semi-evergreen shrub or small tree, 3–6 m high, the trunk usually straight and single, the branches drooping down to form a rounded crown. **BARK:** Grey-black, deeply grooved. Branchlets zigzag, hairy; with **single or paired dark brown thorns to 2 cm long, in a pair, one straight, one curved back.** **LEAVES:** Markedly alternate along the stems, oval, leathery, variable in length, 5–8 cm, **the leaf base unequal, shiny green above, hairy orange–yellow–grey below, 3–5 clear veins, edge finely toothed, stalk short and hairy.** **FLOWERS:** Green-yellow, in small star-like heads, 1–2 cm, stalks 1 cm, beside leaves. They have an unpleasant sharp smell. **FRUIT:** **Rounded, 2–3 cm, smooth, ripening to shiny red-brown, 1–3 seeds inside, the inner stone surrounded by sweet edible flesh.**

ECOLOGY: A common African tree of medium to low altitudes from Senegal to Ethiopia and south to South Africa. It grows throughout eastern Africa. Widespread in Kenya in wooded grassland, bushed grassland and along rivers. Very common between Nairobi and Thika. Found in well-drained soils, e.g. sandy, 400–2,000 m. Agroclimatic Zones III–IV. Fruits in June in Kitui; August–October in Bungoma, Kiambu, Machakos and Moyale; and December–January in Kisumu and West Pokot. Flowers in January–February in Kiambu and Kitui; May–June in Meru and Turkana; in July in West Pokot and Narok; and March–May in Bungoma.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, timber (construction, interior work), furniture, poles, carvings, utensils (pestles, yokes), edible fruit pulp, medicine (roots, leaves, ash from burned leaves), fodder (leaves for camels and goats), bee forage, shade, dye (bark), fibre (bark), live fence, ceremonial (leaves used by the Digo to wash corpses).

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, direct sowing at site.

SEED: Collect fruits, remove pulp and dry. About 1,700 stones per kg. Each stone contains 1–3 seeds (multi-germ).

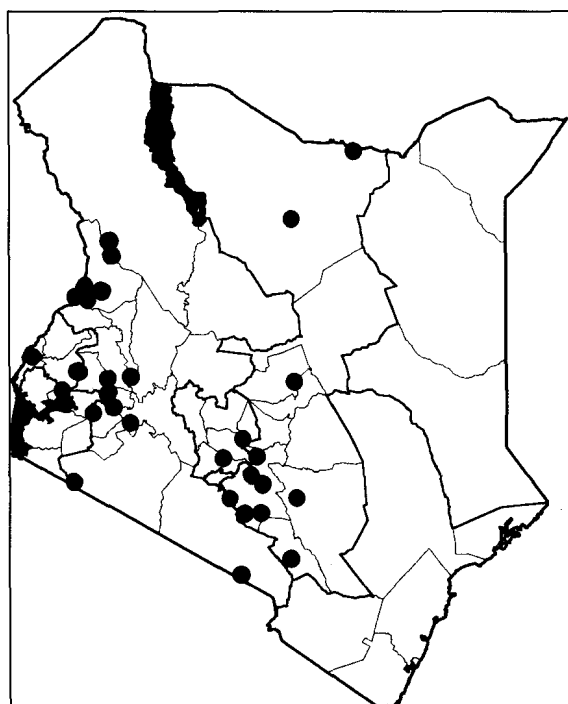
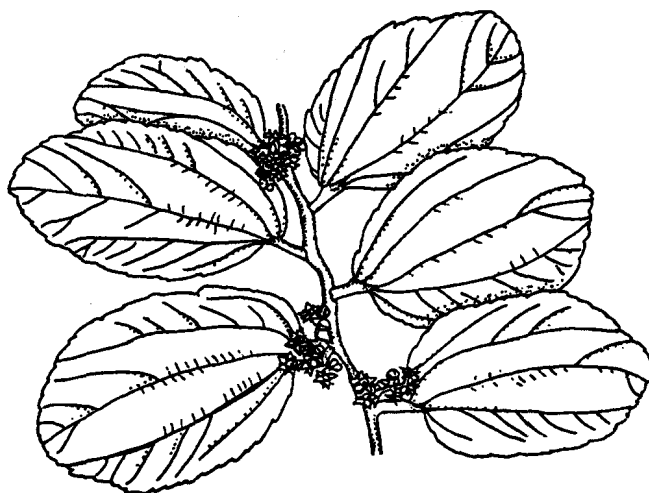
treatment: Crack the hard cover carefully or soak in cold water for 24 hours before sowing.

storage: Uncracked stones can be stored for long periods.

MANAGEMENT: Pruning.

REMARKS: The rather dry cream pulp and the outer skin are edible. The pulp has a sweet, slightly bitter taste, but the edible portion is rather small. The timber is heavy, hard and resistant to termites and borers. The spiny branches make this plant useful as a protective live fence. The bark yields a cinnamon-coloured dye.

Z. pubescens (**Giriama:** Mgugune; **Pokomo:** Mwaragidthe) is a shrub or tree to 12 m which, unlike other species in the genus, is without spines. Fruits are small, to 1 cm. Leaves have a narrow tip and toothed edge and are thinly hairy below. It occurs mainly in Kenya's coastal areas, including lower parts of Tana



Ziziphus abyssinica (cont)

River, and scarcely at all in the western part of the country. It is found in riverine and swamp forests and in bushland below 1,400 m. The fruit is edible and the stems are used for firewood. The wood is heavy, good for charcoal and used for handles by the Pokomo.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Katende et al., 1995, 1999; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990; Ruffo et al., 2002; Storrs, 1979.

