

***Trema orientalis* (*T. guineensis*)**

Ulmaceae

Asia

COMMON NAMES: **Digo:** Mbonobono; **English:** Charcoal tree, Gunpowder tree; **Giriama:** Mzunguzungu, Mutsugutsugu; **Embu:** Mubebu; **Kikuyu:** Muhethu; **Kipsigis:** Poponet; **Kisii:** Omonyia; **Luhya:** Musakala; **Luhya (Bukusu):** Kumuniopo; **Maasai:** Olawoshai; **Meru:** Muethu; **Pokomo:** Mhahe, Mbarabara; **Samburu:** Lnyalikoi, Lositet; **Sanya:** Magugu; **Swahili:** Mpesi; **Taita:** Mwensu; **Taveta:** Mbaranyungu.

DESCRIPTION: A shrub or much-branched tree to 12 m. **BARK:** Light grey, smooth, branchlets hairy. **LEAVES:** Alternate along drooping branchlets, to 14 cm long, rough and dull above, hairy below, the edge finely toothed all round, the blade unequal-sided. **FLOWERS:** Small, yellow-green, separate male and female flowers. **FRUIT:** Small, round and fleshy, black when ripe, 4–6 mm, containing one black seed in green flesh.

ECOLOGY: *Trema orientalis* has a pan-tropical distribution but is believed to have originated in Asia, where it is widely distributed from the western Himalayas to the Pacific, extending into China, southern Japan and to Queensland, Australia. In Africa, from Senegal and Sudan to the Cape in higher-rainfall areas, up to 2,200 m. Found in riverine forest or forest margins as a pioneer that quickly invades clearings and disturbed well-drained soils. Widespread in Kenya from the coast to Lakes Turkana and Victoria but not in the north-eastern part of the country. It is a common plant around Nairobi. Birds are very fond of the fruit and disperse the fleshy drupes. Regenerates profusely through its numerous seeds and is a common colonizer of disturbed rainforest. Agroclimatic Zones II–IV. Flowers and fruits year round.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, poles, posts, medicine (bark, leaves), fodder (leaves, fruit), bee forage, shade, ornamental, mulch, soil conservation, insect repellent, tannin, dye, veterinary medicine.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, cuttings.

SEED: About 370,000 seeds per kg; germination rate 30–75%; 70% of seeds may germinate within 10–30 days.

treatment: Not necessary.

storage: Viability can be maintained for 6 months in airtight containers at room temperature.

MANAGEMENT: Very fast growing. May attain 1 m within 6 weeks of germination; coppicing.

REMARKS: A host tree for many butterflies. The timber is soft and of poor quality. It does not compete with crops. Both bark and leaves contain a saponin, a tannin and sugar and have been used for de-worming and as cough medicine.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Backes and Ahenda, 1998; Beentje, 1994; Dharani, 2002; Katende et al., 1995; Kokwaro, 1993; Mbuya et al., 1994; National Academy of Sciences, 1980; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Sommerlatte and Sommerlatte, 1990; Storrs, 1979.

