

# Vitex doniana

Verbenaceae



## Indigenous

**Am:** *Plem*

**Eng:** *Black plum*

**Gmz:** *Kokora*

**Sh:** *Gorke*

## Ecology

A semi-deciduous tree found in the more humid areas of tropical Africa, including the Comoro Islands, the Sudan and Ethiopia, and widespread in East Africa south to South Africa. In Ethiopia, the tree is found in *Combretum-Terminalia* woodlands and wooded grasslands, at low altitude in wetter areas and in upland grassland, and is also riverine in Dry and Moist Bereha and Dry, Moist and Wet Kolla and Weyna Dega agroclimatic zones of Gojam, Wolega, Kefa and Sidamo regions, 0–1,800 m.

## Uses

Firewood, charcoal, timber (construction, furniture), poles, food (fruit), medicine (bark, leaves, roots, fruit), fodder (leaves, fruit), bee forage, shade, dye (bark).

## Description

A semi-deciduous tree 8–18 m, with a heavy rounded crown, a straight clear bole and thick twisting branches. **BARK:** Smooth and pale at first, finely grooved, becoming darker and scaly. **LEAVES:** Opposite and compound, the 5 finger-like leaflets held up on a stalk to 15 cm. The 2 lowest leaflets smaller, each one wide and oblong to 14 cm, shortly stalked, tip rounded or notched, leathery and shiny. **FLOWERS:** Fragrant, in dense bunches to

12 cm across on a long stalk, each flower bell-shaped, hairy inside, 4 cream petals and one large petal blue-violet, hairy. **FRUIT:** Oblong to 3 cm, green marked with white, ripening red-black; thin edible flesh around a very hard nut which contains 1–4 seeds. The calyx remains around the fruit and curves back.

## Propagation

Seedlings, direct sowing at site, wildings.

## Seed

About 1,000–1,100 stones per kg. Each stone has 1–4 seed (multi-germ).

**Treatment:** Remove fleshy part of the fruit and immerse stone in warm but not hot water, allow to cool and soak for 24 hours. Without treatment seeds need a very long time to germinate.

**Storage:** Sow fresh for best germination results.

## Management

Medium growth rate. Pruning. Several seedlings may germinate from one stone. Can be separated and pricked out.

## Remarks

The species regenerates naturally by seed and root suckers. Monkeys may disperse the seeds. Forest fires may help break the seed coat before germination. The tree produces a yellowish-white termite resistant timber with an even grain and edible fruits which can be sold.



Photos: Patrick Maundu

