

LOCAL NAMES

Afrikaans (wollerige kapperbos); Amharic (gumero); Arabic (sharube); English (woolly caper-bush); French (caprier d' Afrique); Shona (khawa); Somali (gombor lik); Swahili (mbada paka); Tigrigna (andel)

BOTANIC DESCRIPTION

Capparis tomentosa is often a spiny scrambler or a small tree that grows up to 10 m tall, with an upright trunk up to 13-15 cm in diameter and covered with scattered spines. Trees are well branched and branches are normally covered with thick yellow hairs; even the robust, recurved spines are often hairy.

Leaves soft and velvety, light green to greyish-green, sometimes rusty coloured, alternate, 2.5-8 cm long, 1.3-3.8 cm wide, oval, oblong, or egg shaped, usually thickly velvet but sometimes smooth; tip usually rounded with a sharp, short point, sometimes notched or blunt; base rounded or narrowed; margin entire and rolled under. Spines grow in the axils of the leaves and are short, downward hooked and sharply pointed, broad based and vicious. Petiole up to 10 mm long, densely velvety.

Buds grow in clusters and open into large, fragrant flowers with pale yellowish-green petals, up to 3.5 cm in diameter, encircling a tuft of long, slender, white or pink stamens 3.5 cm long; conspicuous gynophore.

The flowers develop into pendulous fruits from the size of a cherry to that of a golf ball, with a stout neck or stalk, globose, 3.5 cm in diameter, pink to bright orange when ripe, often hanging in great numbers, with a semi-transparent bluish-grey flesh surrounding and strongly adhering to the brown seeds. Seeds are oval and smooth.

The generic name is derived from the Arabic 'kappar', the name for *Capparis spinosa*. The specific name 'tomentosa' means 'densely hairy' in reference to the hairiness of the leaves and branches.

BIOLOGY

In southern Africa flowering occurs from August to November and fruiting from December to March.

ECOLOGY

The species grows from Natal, Swaziland, Transkei, Zululand, and eastern and northern Transvaal, westward across Botswana into northern Namibia, and northwards into tropical Africa. It occurs in coastal bush, forests, riverbanks, mountain slopes, evergreen forests, hot and dry thornveld, and in arid sandy plains. It grows most often as a spiny, scrambling bush or dense climber, hauling itself into the branches of trees and shrubs. It also grows on the tops of anthills, making a solid, tidy crown and occurs in the semi-arid and humid lowland and highland woodlands, forest edges and scrub. May become a weed if not adequately controlled.

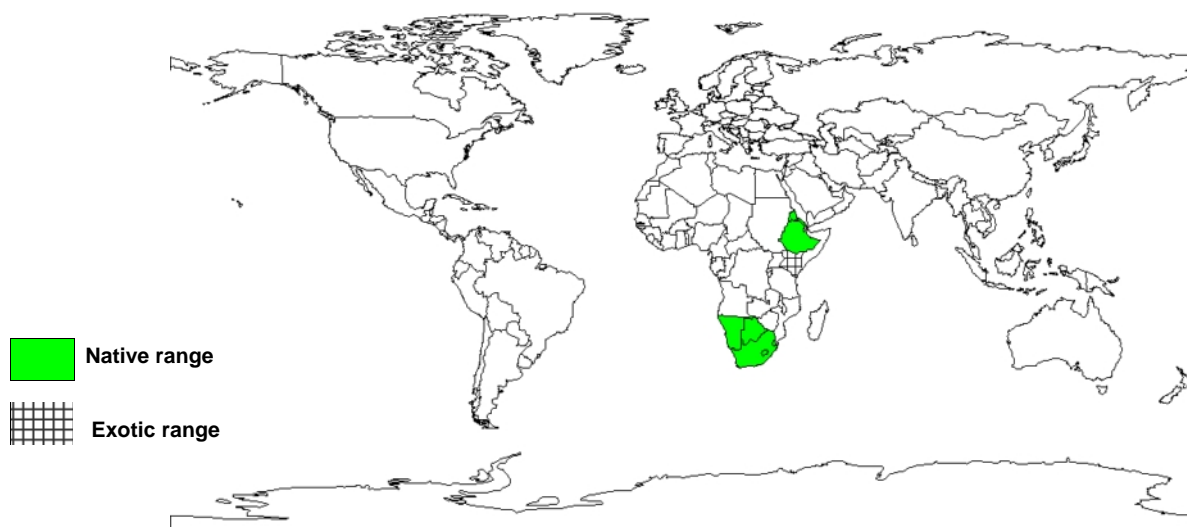
BIOPHYSICAL LIMITS

Altitude: 1 200-2 300 m

DOCUMENTED SPECIES DISTRIBUTION

Native: Botswana, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland

Exotic: Kenya



The map above shows countries where the species has been planted. It does neither suggest that the species can be planted in every ecological zone within that country, nor that the species can not be planted in other countries than those depicted. Since some tree species are invasive, you need to follow biosafety procedures that apply to your planting site.

PRODUCTS

Food: Fruits are edible and are popular with African children.

Fodder: Leaves, although browsed by cattle, kudu and rhino, are believed to be poisonous.

Fuel: *C. tomentosa* is suitable for firewood.

Poison: Roots of the species are very poisonous.

Medicine: The Zulus of South Africa use it to cure madness, snakebite, headache, impotence and sterility (in women). It is also used to treat fever; mixed with dried hyena and antelope blood and ox fat, it is used in the ritual treatment of pneumonia. A decoction of the leaves is used for the treatment of asthma; a decoction prepared by scraping the bark and mixing it with goat soup is drunk for chest pains. Decoction of the root is a cough remedy, but it must be used with care, as it is highly poisonous when taken in large quantities.

Other products: Roots are sometimes used as a love charm. A stick coated with powder from the roots is pointed to the sky as a safeguard against floods, and in Ethiopia, roots are mixed with roots of *Adatoda schimperi* to form a juice that is believed to ward off the evil eye.

SERVICES

Boundary or barrier or support: Trees are grown as a live fence.

TREE MANAGEMENT

Lopping is a suitable silvicultural practice.

FURTHER READNG

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Bekele-Tesemma A, Birnie A, Tengnas B. 1993. Useful trees and shrubs for Ethiopia. Regional Soil Conservation Unit (RSCU), Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).

Coates-Palgrave K. 1988. Trees of southern Africa. C.S. Struik Publishers Cape Town.

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Kokwaro JO. 1976. Medicinal plants of East Africa. East African Literature Bureau.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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