

# Acokanthera schimperi

*Apocynaceae*

Indigenous

Eng: Arrow poison tree

Sh: Erra, Asraerra

Tg: Mebtae

Tr: Mektee

**Ecology:** A tree of dry woodland, thickets and grasslands, widespread in east and southern Africa. It prefers rich well-drained forest soil but also grows on black-cotton and poor soils. In Eritrea, it is most frequent in the highlands and in both eastern and western escarpments from 700-2,300 m. In the eastern escarpment, it is found around Dongolo, Embatkala, Mt. Bizen, Dekemhare, Menguda, Mrara, Tselema, the Mereb basin and Elabered.

**Uses:** Spear shafts, **medicine**, arrow poison (white latex from roots, leaf or bark), ornamental, **shade** (livestock).

**Description:** A dense evergreen or **small rounded tree** with a short bole to 5 m, sometimes 10 m. **BARK:** Dark brown, grooved with age, young twigs flattened. **LEAVES:** **Opposite, dark shiny green above, stiff and leathery, oval to rounded 4-7 cm, tip pointed and sharp.** **FLOWERS:** Appearing with early rains, in dense, **fragrant clusters**, almost stalkless, white-pink, tubular. **FRUIT:** **Oval berries to 1.5 cm, yellow to purple.**

**Propagation:** Seedlings, wildings.

**Seed:** Produces much seed, but difficult to germinate.

**treatment:** Soak in cold water to separate the fleshy part of the fruit from the seeds.

**storage:** Seeds can be stored for up to two years at room temperature without losing much of their viability.

**Management:** Slow growing. Coppicing.

**Remarks:** Children eat the ripe purple fruit, as do birds and monkeys.

