

Berchemia discolor

Rhamnaceae

Indigenous

English: Wild almond
Kunda: Mtacha
Nyanja: Mtacha, mziyi
Senga: Msindila

Ecology: Widespread in Africa from the Sudan to South Africa, scattered in open dry woodland along river valleys and frequent on termite mounds. It grows throughout Zambia in lowlands with medium rainfall.

Uses: Timber, poles, **food** (fruit), medicine (roots), fodder, bee forage, **black dye** (heartwood and roots), whitewash (ash).

Description: Usually a semi-deciduous shrub 4–5 m, but can be a big tree, the spreading branches make a shady rounded crown. **BARK:** grey-black or brown, cracking and scaly, **corky spots** on young greenish branches. **LEAVES:** shiny dark green, **sticky when young, oval to 11 cm, lateral veins making a clear pattern.** **FLOWERS:** small yellow-green, profuse in loose clusters, the nectar attracting bees; erratic flowering. **FRUIT:** **oblong, yellow, to 2 cm, 1–2 flat seeds** in sweet edible flesh; ripe February–May.

Propagation: Seedlings, rootsuckers.

Seed: No. of seeds per kg: 3,000–3,500. Germination good and fast.

treatment: Immerse in hot water and allow to cool for 24 hours.

storage: Stores well at room temperature if kept dry.

Management: Coppicing, lopping, pollarding.

Remarks: The sapwood is light and yellow; the heartwood yellow-brown and resinous; perhaps one of the hardest timbers in East and Central Africa. It can bend nails but the wood planes well. The fruit is very rich in vitamin C and sugar and can be boiled with millet to make porridge. Whitewash for painting houses can be made from the ash.

