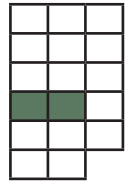


# *Acokanthera schimperi*

Apocynaceae



## Indigenous

**Ag:** *Bisira*

**Eng:** *Poison-arrow tree*

**Am:** *Gararu, Lemem, Merenz*

**Or:** *Qarachu, Qararo, Qararu*

**Sm:** *Wagireedad*

**Tg:** *Mebetti*

**Wt:** *Ladia*

## Ecology

Widespread in East Africa and south to Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland and north-eastern South Africa. In Ethiopia it is a tree of dry woodland, thickets and grasslands in Dry and Moist Weyna Dega agroclimatic zones in nearly all regions. It prefers rich well-drained forest soil, but also grows on black-cotton and poor soils in dry areas, 1,000–2,200 m.

## Uses

Spear shafts, medicine (infusion of the roots), shade (livestock), ornamental, arrow poison (prepared from the white latex from roots, leaf or bark).

## Description

A dense evergreen or small rounded tree, with 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.

## Seed

Produces much seed, but germination is sporadic, 400—450 seed per kg.

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

**Storage:** Seed have high natural water content and therefore should not be stored.

## Management

Slow growing. Coppicing.

## Remarks

Children eat the ripe purple fruit, as do birds and monkeys. Fruit should only be eaten when fully ripe, otherwise the plant is poisonous.

Traditionally, some families, unaware the plant is poisonous, add a pinch of *Acokanthera* leaves into a local beer (“Tela” in Amharic) to make the drink strong and clear.



Photo: Patrick Maundu



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