

Meru Oak

Vitex keniensis

Family: Verbenaceae

Natural Range: Kenya

IUCN Conservation Status

Endangered (EN)

The Meru oak is a deciduous tree capable of growing to a height of 35 m. Found only in Kenya, it occurs naturally in lower and upper montane forests and on thicketed, rocky hills from 1200 to 2100 m.

The species can be recognised by its very thin, rough bark and hairy stems, petioles and veins. The leaves are compound, divided into five leaflets arranged in a vague star formation. Flowers are small and white with a dark mauve petal lobe. The fruits are edible; they are ellipsoid, green at first and becoming black with maturity.

The Meru oak's wood is hard and durable and resembles teak. It is used commonly for the production of furniture and decorative veneers but also for firewood, general timber and beams.

As a consequence of its highly valued timber, the species has been severely over-exploited and is now very rare. It is also threatened by loss of its forest habitat, primarily as a result of agricultural expansion.

Conservation measures for the Meru oak are limited, although the species, being very fast-growing, could potentially be included within various planting schemes in Kenya. This species is being utilised in our on-going forest restoration work at Brackenhurst Botanic Garden.

The Global Trees Campaign was a partnership between Fauna & Flora International and Botanic Gardens Conservation International.

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