

Peace Garden 2026 Kenyan Plant Study



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Introduction

As Western medicine becomes more prevalent throughout the world, there is reason to worry that traditional practices will soon be completely abandoned by many regions across the globe. Not only have these often neglected practices continued to be useful, but they also carry a great cultural and historical significance that should not be buried. Through collaboration with the Lamu Center of Preventative Health (LCPH), the Peace Garden is compiling a guide of plant species found in Lamu, Kenya that aims to bring more attention to the country's herbal practices by showing how their practices align with and differ from Western medicine. This study has been ongoing for three years now, with 15 plants being added to the guide each year. This year's plants include *Cymbopogon citratus*, *Harrisonia abyssinica*, *Toddalia asiatica*, *Pycnanthemum Virginianum*, *Carissa edulis*, *Premna chrysoclada*, *Averrhoa bilimbi*, *Cocos nucifera*, *Simmondsia chinensis*, *Phyllanthus urinaria*, *Irvingia gabonensis*, *Kalanchoe pinnata*, *Solanum Nigrum*, *Nicotiana Glauca*, & *Lactuca virosa*.

Methods

15 plants found in Lamu, Kenya were selected for us by two of our LCPH collaborators—Munib Mafazy and Majid Mafazy—through consultation with local herbalists and conversations with the clinic's patients. The Peace Garden conducted literature reviews for each of the plants and held weekly meetings with LCPH to compare our findings.

Results

Herein, we describe two plants added to the guide this year.

Averrhoa Bilimbi, commonly referred to as bilimbi or cucumber tree, grows 5-10 meters tall with brown bark and bears a tough green fruit a few times a year. Bilimbi is native to Indonesia and prefers a hot, humid tropical or subtropical climate. In Lamu, a juice made from the fruit of bilimbi is used to lower blood pressure. The fruit is also known to have antidiabetic, antioxidant, and antimicrobial properties. It's also commonly used in cooking for its distinct sour taste.

Averrhoa bilimbi



Figure 1: Stock photo of cucumber tree (*Averrhoa bilimbi*).

Irvingia gabonensis, commonly referred to as the African mango tree, grows up to 40 meters tall with grayish-brown, mostly smooth bark, small yellow to white flowers, mild buttresses, abundant surface roots, and is known for its vibrant, sweet fruit. The African mango tree is native to the lowland rainforests of West and Central Africa, and prefers a tropical, humid climate. In Lamu, a tea made from the plant's leaves is used to regulate chronic blood sugar levels, and is often given to diabetic/pre-diabetic patients. The pulp of *Irvingia gabonensis* has been shown to have anti-diarrheal, anti-diabetic, anti-inflammatory, and anti-ulcer properties.

Irvingia gabonensis



Figure 2: Stock photo of African mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*).

Discussion & Future Work

Our research highlights the similarities and differences between the medicinal practices of the Western world and those of Lamu herbalists. We aim to continue updating the guide with new plants and new information about previously covered plants for years to come. The primary end users of our work are the clinicians at LCPH. The guide will provide them the best knowledge available in the literature about the active ingredients and biochemical mechanisms found in each of the plants. The guide also includes the uses, doses, and preparations recommended to us by the Kenyan herbalists.

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