**[‘Magic herb’ is well known to Kenyan scientists(Daily Nation)](http://www.nation.co.ke/News/+Magic+herb++is+well+known+to+Kenyan+scientists+/-/1056/1135354/-/jnh894z/-/)**

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The ‘magic herb’ that has made thousands of people flock to remote Loliondo village in Tanzania was identified by Kenyan scientists four years ago as a cure for a drug-resistant strain of a sexually transmitted disease.

An expert on herbal medicine also said yesterday the herb is one of the most common traditional cures for many diseases. It is known as *mtandamboo* in Kiswahili and it has been used for the treatment of gonorrhoea among the Maasai, Samburu and Kikuyu.

The Kamba refer to it as *mukawa or mutote* and use it for chest pains, while the Nandi boil the leaves and bark to treat breast cancer, headache and chest pains.

Four years ago, local researchers turned to the plant for the treatment of a virus that causes herpes. Led by Dr Festus M Tolo of the Kenya Medical Research Institute (Kemri), the team from the University of Nairobi and the National Museums of Kenya found the herb could provide alternative remedy for herpes infections.

“An extract preparation from the roots of Carissa edulis, a medicinal plant locally growing in Kenya, has exhibited remarkable anti-herpes virus activity for both wild type and drug resistant strains,” they reported in the *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*.

**No negative effects**

“The mortality rate for mice treated with extract was also significantly reduced by between 70 and 90 per cent as compared with the infected untreated mice that exhibited 100 per cent mortality.”

The researchers reported that the extract did not have any negative effects on the mice.

Mrs Grace Ngugi, head of economic ethnobotany at the National Museums of Kenya, said the plant was not poisonous as feared earlier.

Further studies have shown the plant to contain ingredients that make it a good diuretic. Diuretics are drugs used to increase the frequency of urination to remove excess fluid in the body, a condition that comes with medical conditions such as congestive heart failure, liver and kidney disease.

Some diuretics are also used for the treatment of high blood pressure. These drugs act on the kidneys to increase urine output, reducing the amount of fluid in the blood, which in turn lowers blood pressure.

A study at the Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia found the herb was a powerful diuretic. It is found in many parts of the country and is used to treat headache, rheumatism, gonorrhoea, syphilis and rabies, among other diseases.

The Ethiopians tested its potency on mice and found it increased the frequency of urination. This was more so when an extract from the bark of the root was used.

“These findings support the traditional use of Carissa spp. as a diuretic agent,” write the researchers in the*Journal of Alternative Medicin*e.

The Kemri study also isolated other compounds from the herb, including *oleuropein*, an immune booster, and lupeol. Lupeol, according to researchers from the University of Wisconsin, US, was found to act against cancerous cells in mice.

“We showed that lupeol possesses antitumor-promoting effects in a mouse and should be evaluated further,” wrote Dr Mohammad Saleem, a dermatologist.

Mrs Ngugi said the herb was one of the most prevalent traditional cures and herbalists harvest roots, barks and even the fruits to make concoctions for many diseases.

“Among the Mbeere and Tharaka people where the fruit is called ngawa, the plant is used for the treatment of malaria. The fruits, when ripe, are eaten by both children and adults,” she said.