

Arbour Week and Tree of the Year 2014

A Brief History of Arbour Day

Arbour Day originated in 1872 in the United States territory of Nebraska. Mr. J. Sterling Morton, a newcomer to the treeless plains of Nebraska, was a keen proponent of the beauty and benefit of trees. He persuaded the local agricultural board to set aside a day for planting trees and through his position as editor of Nebraska's first newspaper, encouraged participation in the event by publishing articles on the value of trees for soil protection, fruit, shade and building. Mr. Morton's home, known as Arbour Lodge, was a testament to his love for trees and so inspired the name of the holiday; Arbour Day. Within two decades Arbour Day was celebrated in every US State and territory, and eventually spread around the world. The tradition continues annually in the second week of August, in global acknowledgment of Mr. Morton's slogan, "other holidays repose upon the past; Arbour Day proposes for the future."

In South Africa, Arbour Day was first celebrated in 1983. The event captured the imagination of people who recognized the need for raising awareness of the value of trees in our society. As sources of building material, food, medicine, and simple scenic beauty, trees play a vital role in the health and well-being of our communities. Collective enthusiasm for the importance of this issue in South Africa inspired the national government, in 1999, to extend the celebration of Arbour Day to **National Arbour Week**. From **1 to 7 September** every year, schools, businesses and organizations are encouraged to participate in community "greening" events to improve the health and beauty of the local environment and propose a green future for South Africa.

To help increase public awareness of just a few of the 2,000 indigenous tree species in South Africa, every Arbour Week celebration will highlight two specific types of tree; common and rare species.

Year	Common Tree	Rare (Uncommon) Trees
2014	Genus <i>Heteropyxis</i> Lavender trees, Laventelbome	<i>Vepris lanceolata</i> White ironwood, Witysterhout

Heteropyxis natalensis Harvey

Family: Heteropyxidaceae

Common names: Lavender tree, Laventelboom (A),
iNkunzi (Z)

SA Tree Number: 455



The family Heteropyxidaceae, or lavender tree family as it is commonly known, is a small family with only two species in southern Africa. The local genus, *Heteropyxis*, is characterized by alternate, entire, simple leaves with secretory cavities. These emit a pleasant smell when crushed. The flowers are small and inconspicuous.

The genus name of this plant (*Heteropyxis*) is made up of two words. *Hetero* is a Greek word meaning 'different' and *pyxis* is a Latin word meaning 'the container with the lid'. This refers to the capsule (a fruit) that is sometimes called the pyxidium, because it looks like it has a lid. The species name *natalensis* refers to its place of origin, KwaZulu-Natal.



This is a medium to large deciduous tree that grows to about 10 metres high. It occurs naturally on the coastal and inland regions of the KwaZulu-Natal Province. It is also found growing in Mpumalanga, Gauteng, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

The lavender tree has drooping foliage. The leaves are narrowly elliptic and are arranged spirally. They are shiny dark green above and paler green below, slightly hairy to hairless when mature. When crushed they produce a strong lavender scent. The leaf petiole is slender and pink over the lower half.



The main stem is crooked and sometimes fluted. The bark is distinctively pale grey, often almost white and is flaking on the old stem. The flowers, which are yellowish green, appear in summer (December - March). They are very small, about 3 mm in diameter, and are borne in branched terminal clusters. They are

sweetly scented. The fruit is a small oval capsule that is up to 4 x 2.5 mm. It appears between March and May. Its colour is shiny brown and it bears numerous seeds. When ready, it splits into 2 to 3 valves releasing the seeds, after which the old capsules may remain on the tree for months.

This tree has several economic uses. Bark and leaves are browsed by black rhino. Leaves are also used in herbal tea and potpourri. The wood is hard, very fine grained and is pale pinkish brown in colour. It is suitable for use as fencing posts and charcoal. The leaves and roots of this plant are used medicinally and to treat worms in stock. African healers prescribe inhaling the steam from a decoction of the roots to heal a bleeding nose. The roots are also used in the treatment of mental disorders and fresh leaves are used during weaning. The leaves are also used to scent tobacco.

Growing *Heteropyxis natalensis*

The lavender tree can be grown from seeds. They germinate easily and the young plants are relatively quick growing. Sow the seeds in well-drained moist soil and cover them with a thin layer of compost. Make sure they are kept in a warm area as this promotes rapid germination. This plant can also be propagated by cuttings, although the success rate using this method is very low. Fresh cuttings may be taken and rooted in pure sand. Rooting hormone may be used to help promote rooting.

Heteropyxis natalensis is a very decorative tree for small gardens. With its glossy green leaves and a whitish stem, it makes a very good focal point. The leaves develop rich red autumn colours, adding to the tree's attractiveness. The flowers attract bees, wasps and butterflies.

References

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Vepris lanceolata (Lam.) G.Don

Family : Rutaceae (buchu family)

Common names : white ironwood (Eng.); witysterhout (Afr.); Muruvula (Tsonga); Muhondwa (Venda); umZane (Xhosa); umOzana (Zulu)



What a lovely, underrated shrub or tree-a plant that South Africans can definitely try in their gardens in the future!

Description

The white ironwood is mostly an evergreen shrub or small tree of up to 5 m in height, but can reach a height of 20 m in dry forest areas. The bark is smooth and grey to dark grey in colour.

The leaves are trifoliolate, leathery, alternately arranged on the stem, and hairless. The leaflets are narrowly elliptic in shape, with the margins entire and markedly wavy; the apex tapers to a more or less rounded point. As the plant belongs to the Rutaceae family, the leaves are densely covered with gland-dots and have a lemony scent when crushed.

The flowers are small, inconspicuous, star-shaped and arranged in terminal heads or panicles and are greenish yellow in colour. The male and female flowers are borne on different trees. The white ironwood flowers from December to March.

The globose, 4-locular fruit of about 5 mm in diameter is covered by a smooth, thin, fleshy cover that turns black when ripe. The fruit is covered with gland-dots that have the same lemony scent as the leaves. The fruit ripens from May to July.



The wood is hard, heavy, strong, elastic and even-grained with a whitish to pale yellow colour.

Distribution

This lovely plant occurs in dune, riverine and low-lying forest along the coast from the Western Cape, through Eastern Cape to Kwazulu-Natal and the woodland and escarpment forests in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, the northern section of Gauteng and the northeastern section of the North-West Province .

Derivation of name and historical aspects

The most noteworthy members of this family are the buchus (*Agathosma* species) that occur in the Cape and are used medicinally and in the well-known buchu brandy. The generic name *Vepris* originated from the Latin word *vepres* meaning a bramble or thorny shrub. The word *lanceolata* refers to the shape of the leaflets.

Ecology

According to Thomas & Grant (2004), three different species of caterpillars of the Swallowtail butterfly family feed on this tree and the best known of the species is the Citrus Swallowtail butterfly, *Papilio demodocus*. It is also reported that porcupines eat the bark and ultimately ring-bark the trees, causing them to die. A number of bird species have been noted to love the fruits, such as the Redwinged Starling and the Crested Barbet.

Uses and cultural aspects

Traditionally the powdered roots are used for influenza and colic and the leaves are burnt to dispel evil spirits. The wood is used to produce wheel spokes, handles, roof beams, furniture, ornaments and turnery.



Growing *Vepris lanceolata*

Vepris lanceolata makes an excellent garden subject and can be grown from seed; the young plants transplant well. It can tolerate some frost and can survive occasional drought, but does not flourish in very dry areas. The tree grows reasonably fast and does not have a very aggressive root system. It can be pruned in different shapes and makes a good container plant.

References and further reading

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