

MEDICINAL PLANTS OF THE PRINCE ALBERT REGION (in the medicinal garden at the Fransie Pienaar Museum)

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with

Rufford Small Grants Foundation for Nature Conservation, UK



1. *Mentha longifolia* (Longleaf mint, Balderja) The strong-smelling leaves can be rubbed onto the skin to ward off mosquitoes or to help heal wounds. A tea made from the leaves is used to treat a number of conditions including fevers, headaches, indigestion, menstrual pains and colic.

2. *Ballota africana* (Cat herb, Kattekruie) The Khoi believed in the healing power of this plant to treat fevers and measles. Kattekruie remains an important herb used today (mainly as a tea) for the treatment of coughs, colds, influenza, bronchitis, sore throats, insomnia, bladder and kidney infections.

3. *Melianthus comosus* (Kruidjie-roer-my-niet) leaves are toxic and only external use is advised. Leaf poultices are applied to alleviate aching backs, wounds, bruises and rheumatism. The Khoi believed that this plant heals snake bites.

4. *Chrysocoma ciliata* (Bitterbos, Bitterkaroo) A decoction made of the plant is used to wash sores, wounds and syphilis. It is also said that this decoction helps to alleviate rheumatism, constipation and gastric fever.

5. *Artemisia afra* (Wild Wormwood; Wilde-als) is one of the most well-known indigenous medicinal plants used in South Africa. It is primarily the leaves that are used as a treatment for various ailments but mainly for fevers, colds and chest problems. Nasal congestion and headaches is said to be alleviated successfully by placing rolled-up leaves into the nostrils or by inhaling the dried powdered form of the leaves.

6. *Conyza ivaefolia* (Oven Bush, Oondbos) Traditionally the branches of this plant were used to sweep ovens. Infusions are also used as a treatment for influenza, fever, chest complaints and heart conditions. Steaming with this plant is known to open blocked nasal passages.

7. *Leonotis leonurus* (Lion's ear, Wildedagga) An external application of an infusion made with the leaves is believed to soothe various conditions such as eczema, itchiness, insect bites and muscular pains. Decoctions are taken internally to treat coughs, colds and influenza.

8. *Sutherlandia frutescens* (Cancerbush, Kankerbos, Hoenderkloek) is a well-known medicinal plant in South Africa that was used by early colonists to treat stomach ailments and internal cancers. It is believed that the medicinal use of this plant stems from the Khoi who used it externally as a wash for wounds and internally as a remedy for fever.

9. *Helichrysum petiolare* (Kooigoed) Kooigoed is a well-known medicinal plant and an infusion of the leaves is used to treat a number of conditions including fever, headaches, colds and menstrual cramps. The soft leaves and flowers can be used to stuff pillows which deter insects but at the same time treat restlessness thus ensuring a good night's rest.

10. *Felicia filifolia* (Felicia, Steenbokbossie) A mixture of this plant with *Mentha longifolia* (Balderja) is used as a treatment for chest ailments, asthma and bronchitis. A brew was made consisting of Felicia, *Artemisia afra* (Wilde als) and steenbuck droppings as a remedy for measles.

11. *Chironia baccifera* (Wild Gentian, Toothache berry, Aambeibos, Tandpynbossie, Bitterbossie) A decoction of the entire plant is a well-known blood purifier in the treatment of boils, skin disorders and abscesses. An infusion made of

the plant is used to treat haemorrhoids by applying it externally to the area several times a day. The plant is toxic and over-use can be harmful. Side-effects include drowsiness and excessive perspiration.

12. *Dicerthamnus rhinocerotis* (Renosterbos), previously called *Elytropappus rhinocerotis*, was allegedly a widely used treatment during the 1918 influenza epidemic due to its effect to induce perspiration. Infusions of the leaves and twigs in brandy are a popular Cape remedy for stomach disorders (such as ulcers and stomach cancers) and indigestion. This infusion also acts as an appetite stimulator. A popular use of the plant is to chew the leaf tips for thirst.

13. *Pentzia incana* (Anchor Karoo Bush, Ankerkaroo) leaves can be chewed or infused to alleviate constipation and stomach aches. The young stems are chewed to ease toothache.

14. *Withania somnifera* (Winter Cherry, Geneesbossie, Wilde-appeliefie) leaf poultices are applied externally to wounds, haemorrhoids, abscesses and syphilis. An infusion of the roots is used to treat asthma, colds, fever and influenza. The medicinal use of this plant is extensive and ranges from an insecticide and sedative to an anti-aging treatment and memory enhancer.

15. *Pollichia campestris* (Wild Sugar Bush, Waxberry plant; Teesuikerkaroo) The waxy parts of the fruit have a sweet taste and was apparently used by the boers during the Great Trek as a sweetener (crushing and crystallizing these flower parts) hence the name Teesuikerkaroo. The steam of an infusion made from this plant is believed to open blocked nasal passages and to treat bronchitis. A popular medicinal use of this plant includes placing warmed leaves externally to help soothe aching muscles and joints, and bruises.

16. *Cissampelos capensis* (Dawidjieswortel) is a very familiar medicinal plant, especially in the Western Cape, and it is mainly the roots and rhizomes that are used medicinally. It is believed that chewing the rhizomes or drinking an infusion of the rhizomes, will help to combat boils, syphilis, cholera, diarrhoea and bladder disorders.

17. *Pelargonium quercifolium* (Oak-leaved Geranium, Muishondbos) The dried leaves of this strong-smelling geranium are useful to ward off unwanted insects,

especially moths. A tea made from leaves is a treatment for high blood pressure, rheumatism and heart ailments.

18. *Pelargonium zonale* Treats the same ailments as for *Pelargonium quercifolium*.

19. *Eriocephalus ericoides* (Kapokbos, Wilde Roosmaryn) Kapokbos has a pungent smell and can be used as a repellent for fleas and lice. The fluffy seed head has a delightful scent and was used to stuff pillows and duvets. It is also a known treatment for kidney and bladder disorders (as the infusion stimulates the kidneys to remove the excess water). Kapokbos can also be used to add flavour to savoury dishes.

20. *Pelargonium peltatum* (Ivy-leaved Geranium, Kolsuring) leaves can help to alleviate earache by the insertion of a warmed, rolled-up leaf directly into the ear. A bandage can be used to tie around the head in order to keep ear warm and the leaf in place. An infusion made from the roots of this plant is used as a remedy for colds, influenza and diarrhoea.

21. *Bulbine frutescens* (Cat's tail, Balsem-kopieva, Katstert) is well known in households of South Africa and it is always kept close at hand. The fleshy, jelly-like leaves are applied to burns, acne, insect bites, blisters, rashes and chapped lips to help soothe and heal the area.

22. *Tulbaghia violaceae* (Wild Garlic, Wilde Knoffel) is mainly used as a treatment for colds, fever, asthma and tuberculosis. Wild garlic is also used in cooking to add a delicious flavour to savoury dishes. Regular use of Wild Garlic in your diet allegedly helps to combat high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels.

23. *Crinum bulbispermum* (Wild Amaryllis, Rivier lelie) The Sotho use the bulbs and leaves to make a brew for the treatment of coughs and colds. They also believe that applying the brew externally will help to heal and alleviate wounds, haemorrhoids and scrofula (a form of tuberculosis).

24. *Boophone disticha* (Tumbleweed, Candelabra flower, Bushman Poison Bulb, Gifbol) bulbs contain neurotoxins and many deaths have been recorded from its use. The Khoisan applied it to arrows for hunting. The bulb has sedative properties and people of the Karoo often placed the scales of the bulb in their pillows to treat

insomnia. Doses of the bulb cause hallucinations and was used in initiation rites and for divination in certain African tribes. The dry scales of the bulb are applied externally to wounds, burns and various skin conditions to aid healing and to ease the pain. A weak decoction of the bulb is used as a pain killer to alleviate headaches, abdominal pains and chest pains.

25. *Hoodia gordonii* (Bitter ghaap) The Khoi ate this bitter-tasting succulent as a thirst quencher in the arid areas but today this plant is a popular commercial ingredient in numerous weight loss products, which claim to suppress your appetite.

26. *Euphorbia mauritanica* (Geelmelkbos) The white latex is poisonous and was used by the Khoi for their poison arrows. Today the latex is applied externally to warts and corns which are said to soften them and eventually cause them to fall off.

27. *Aloe ferox* (Cape Aloe, Bitter-aalwyn) Colonists were taught by the Khoi that the sap of the leaves can be used as a wound dressing. The leaf juice is used to treat burns and to rid dogs and cattle of internal and external parasites. African tribes apply the juice as a treatment for sores. The juice of the leaves is a strong purgative for both humans and animals. A delicious preserve (konfyt) can be made from the leaves. Today the Cape Aloe is found in various forms such as pills and gels. It is commercially important as a laxative and is used in several popular mixtures.

28. *Cotyledon orbiculata* (Pig's ear, Varkoorplakkie, Kouterie, Kouterbos) fleshy leaves are applied as a plaster to warts and corns that softens them and eventually causes it to fall off. Drops from the warmed leaf juice can be used as a remedy for earache and toothache. It is believed that the Khoi ate a leaf of this plant after consuming an animal that has died from anthrax.

29. *Sarcostemma viminale* (Melktou, Spantou) It is believed that chewing the plant stimulates the flow of breast milk in nursing mothers.

30. *Crassula subaphylla* (Louhout) leaves are either chewed or the powdered form is taken to relieve stomach ailments such as cramps, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and flatulence.

31. *Crassula muscosa* (Lizard's Tail Bush, Skoenveterplakkie) Infusions made of the entire plant are used as a remedy for diarrhoea and abdominal pains.

32. *Crassula arborescens* (Beestebul) Beestebul was used to treat epilepsy and they say that this plant holds local anaesthetic properties.

33. *Sceletium tortuosum* (Kougoed) dried leaves are chewed or the powdered form is inhaled to reduce stress or to treat insomnia. It is believed that the Khoisan used this plant as a mood-lifting substance.

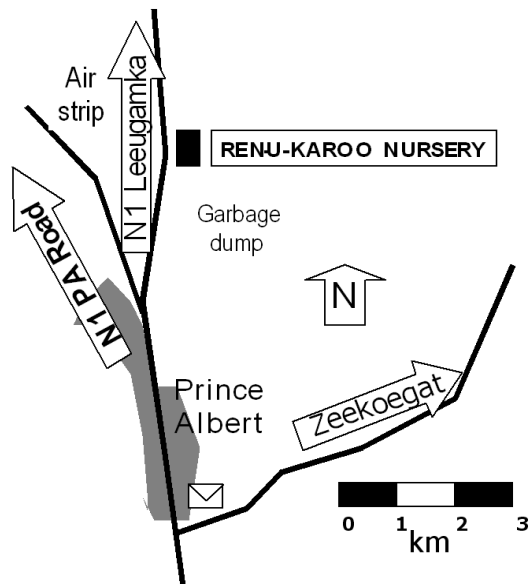
34. *Portulacaria afra* (Spekboom) This is a versatile plant and is used in a variety of ways ranging from cooking to medicinal remedies. The leaves add a delightful taste to salads and stews. These leaves are also sucked to treat over-exhaustion and dehydration due to its thirst quenching characteristic. It is also believed that chewing the leaves promotes the flow of breast milk. Leaf poultices are applied to blisters, corns, acne, insect bites, sunburn and aching feet. High blood sugar levels are apparently effectively treated by chewing the leaves several times a day.

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