

**Scientific name:** *Parinari curatellifolia*

**Family:** Chrysobalanaceae

**Common names:** Mobola plum, gryssappel, bosappel, Mmola, Mbulwa, Mobola, Muvhula, Umkhunga

### Origin and distribution

Mobola plum is native to Africa. It is widely distributed from Senegal and Kenya to the southern part of Mpumalanga and Swaziland, towards Zimbabwe and the northern part of Limpopo Province.

### Growing areas in South Africa

It is found in the wild in Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces.

### Description

Mobola plum is an evergreen, tropical fruit tree with a mushroom-like shape and grows up to 20 m tall.

### Stem

The stem is bare and dense, with a round to mushroom-shaped crown and branches that droop all around. At certain times of the year, particularly in hot weather, it can emit an unpleasant odour.

### Bark

The bark is dark grey and rough.

### Leaves

The leaves are dark green on top, hairy and grey to yellow underneath on a short petiole.

### Flowers

Mobola plum flowers are small, white and sweet-scented and occur in short panicles (4 to 6 cm diameter) in the leaf axils. The stalks and calyx are covered with yellowish, woolly hairs. The bisexual flowers have five sepals, five petals, seven or more

stamens and a two-chambered ovary. The stamens are joined at the base in a ring that is inserted into the mouth of the receptacle.

### Fruit

Fruit is oval to round and 30 to 50 mm long, yellow-red in colour, turning brown as it ripens. It has a rough, scaly skin, with golden coloured warts on the surface.

### Climate and soil requirements, temperature

The mobola plum is sensitive to extreme weather, such as frost and cold winds. It grows well at mean minimum and maximum temperatures of 10 °C and 30 °C, respectively.

### Rainfall

Mobola plum mostly grows in areas with a mean annual rainfall of  $\pm 400$  mm.

### Soil

It prefers light yellowish-brown to reddish-yellow, sandy clay loams, red to dark red, friable clays with a laterite horizon, and yellow-red loamy sands. This tree occurs primarily on well-drained soils, fairly acid and sandy soils.

### Cultivation practices

#### PROPAGATION

The plant is propagated through seed, coppice or suckers.

### Soil preparation

Soil preparation is best done a month or more before planting so that the soil has time to settle. Dig a 60 cm deep by 1, 2 m square hole, incorporating as much organic material as possible with the aim to get the soil into a crumbly texture.

### Planting

Collect fresh seeds from the tree. Clean the flesh away and dry the seed in the shade. Pretreat the seed by immersing them in boiling water for 15 minutes and allowing them to cool and then soaking for 24 hours. Sow the seeds in river sand in a flat seedling tray. Press the seeds down until they are level with soil surface and cover with a thin layer of sand. Transplant the seedling into a nursery bag when they reach the 3-leaf stage. Transplant the seedling into the veld or garden after two years.

### Pest control

Infestation of weevils' larvae in the stone of *P. curatellifolia* destroys the seed and induces leaf drop. Nematodes and ground beetles (Carabids) can be used as biological control agents. The nematodes can be introduced into the soil where they are active to feed on the weevil larvae. Ground beetles also feed on weevil grubs, pupae and



adults. It is advisable to apply recommended insecticide to control adult weevils before egg laying starts.

### Harvesting maturity

The tree starts to bear fruit from October to January. The fruit can be harvested when it turns yellow orange and this is done by hand picking. The fruit often falls to the ground before fully mature.

### Uses

The ripe fruit is edible and rich in vitamin C. It can be cooked as porridge or made into beer. The crushed pulp of the fruit is an ingredient in making juice. It can also be used as dried food. The oil-enriched nuts are eaten alone or mixed with vegetables and are considered as almonds substitutes. The edible oil is used for cooking or the production of paint, varnish and soap.

### Other uses

An extract from the bark is used in tanning and for dyeing in basketry. It is reported that a roots and bark infusion is used for the treatment of snakebites, toothache and fractures. The twigs are used as chew sticks. Mobola plum timber is very durable, hard and heavy and is often used for fine woodwork, mortars, canoes and mine timber. Poor quality timber as a result of weather exposure is used for basic building purposes such as poles for huts and sheds.

### References

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