

Scientific name: *Mimusops zeyheri*

Family: Sapotaceae

Common names: Transvaal red milkwood, moepel, Mmupudu, umPushane, Nhlantswa, Mubululu.

Origin and distribution

Red milkwood is native to Africa. It is widely distributed from Tanzania in the north to KwaZulu-Natal in the south.

Growing areas in South Africa

Red milkwood usually grows in woodland on rocky hillside, in kloof and riverine vegetation. It is found in the wild in the Limpopo, Gauteng, North West, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and Free State provinces.

Description

Red milkwood is a large, evergreen plant, growing up to 15 m tall.

Bark

The bark is grey, smooth on young branches, but dark brown, rough and hard on older branches.

Stem

The stem has a wide canopy with a dark-brown colour, smooth when young and fissured on old trunks.

Roots

The tree has a non-aggressive lateral root system.

Leaves

The leaves are glossy, dark green and carried on a spreading crown, which could easily be as wide as the tree's height. The leaves are elliptic to

obovate, mostly spiralled at the ends of branches, leathery, dark green above and paler below. Young leaves and twigs are covered in rusty-brown, velvety hairs.

Flowers

The flowers are borne in clusters, creamy white and strongly scented.

Fruit

The fruit is yellow to deep orange, oval in shape and fleshy up to 30 x 25 mm. The ripe yellow fruit has a glossy, brittle skin.

Climatic and soil requirements

TEMPERATURE

The red milkwood grows best where annual mean temperatures are 12°C to 25°C. The plant can tolerate occasional slight frost.

Rainfall

In native regions, the red milkwood requires an average rainfall of 464 mm a year and does best when the rain is well distributed. The tree is able to withstand seasonal drought if the water deficit is

not too severe and can survive in areas with more than 1 500 mm rainfall.

Soil

Red milkwood requires well-aerated, free-draining soils, with a good holding capacity of nutrients.

Cultivation practices

PROPAGATION

The plant is propagated through seeds.

PLANTING

Collect fresh fruit seeds and treat these with a fungicide beforehand to prevent damping off. Sow seed in a flat seedling tray in a mixture of river sand and compost. Plant seeds not deeper than 5 mm and then transplant the seedlings into nursery bags after 6 weeks. Plant the seedlings in the open ground when the seedlings have reached a height of 250 mm.

FERTILISATION

When growing seedlings in nurseries balanced use of horticultural fertilisers is advised. At planting an addition of 10 kg manure, 0,5 kg lime, 0,1 kg superphosphate and 0,1 kg potassium chloride is recommended.

IRRIGATION

Water the seedling well for the first year and reduce gradually for two to three years to ensure the development of a deep root system.

DISEASE AND PEST CONTROL

Red milkwood is not prone to diseases, but may attract caterpillars at certain times. Caterpillars can be removed by hand or by using a strong spray of water.



The red milkwood may also attract scale insects on the young stems and growth tips. If it becomes necessary, they may be sprayed with a product registered for use on scale. Mineral oil can be effective and is harmless to the ladybird beetles and spiders as well as the environment.

Harvesting maturity

Red milkwood starts to bear fruit from April to October. The fruit is harvested when about half yellow and continue to ripen after harvest. Full ripening occurs in 1 to 5 days, when the fruit pulp loses the sticky latex that is abundant in immature pulp and the skin. The fruit can be harvested by hand picking.

Uses

Ripen fruit is edible and rich in vitamin C.

Other uses

Red milkwood makes a good shade and specimen tree.



References

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