



MARULA

(Sclerocarya birrea)



Global
Facilitation
Unit
for Underutilized
Species

enabling deployment of underutilized species



What is Marula and where does it come from?

The marula is a deciduous tree that grows up to 18 meters tall and grows widely in Southern and Eastern Africa. The tree is widespread in Zimbabwe at lower altitudes in warm dry areas on sandy soil. Male and female flowers appear on separate trees, growing in small stiff heads, dark red in bud, opening to pink, white and lilac lobes. The marula tree is a prolific bearer: between 0.2 and 1.5 metric tons of fruit per tree has been collected in one season in the wild. Mature fruit drops when still green and ripens to a yellow colour on the ground.

The name marula comes from the Tswana for a favourite haunt of barbets and woodpeckers, who make their nests in the soft wood. The flowers attract great numbers of insects and therefore other birds as well. Antelopes, elephants, monkeys and goats eat the ripe fruits fallen and fermenting on the ground, and are said to become drunk on them.

PROPERTIES

Of all the nutrients in the marula, the vitamin C content has attracted the most attention. As much as 200mg vitamin C per 100g has been recorded in the marula pulp which is approximately four times that of oranges and comparable to the amount present in guavas and blackcurrents. Each seed contains two or three edible nuts. Oil can be pressed from these and used as a preservative or for cosmetic purposes. The nuts can be eaten raw or roasted and are rich in oil and protein.

❖ Food and beverages

The fruit is eaten fresh, just like a mango, and is also used to prepare juices, jams, preserves, dry fruit rolls, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. The taste of marula jelly can be compared with that of honey.

❖ Health

In traditional medicine, different parts of the marula are used to treat a variety of ailments. The *bark* is used for the treatment of diarrhoea and dysentery and as a malaria prophylactic; the *inner bark* is used to treat insect bites and burns of hairy caterpillars: the *leaves* are considered precious in soothing burns and abscesses.

Claims are made that the fruit may be used as an insecticide as well as a germicide and that the juice may relieve stomach ailments.

❖ Other Uses

The marula bark makes a dye for basketry and the juice leaves an indelible stain on clothing. The wood, though soft and easily worked, is not very durable and is used only for making small articles. It is an attractive pink colour, well liked for making plates and spoons.

HARVESTING

Harvesting is done by picking up the fallen fruit. The fruit ripens from February to June and is fleshy, 30-35mm in diameter with a white clinging flesh and a large stone.



MARULA

Contribution to rural and social development

Recognizing the potential for commercialisation of the *marula* fruit, but also the need for sustainable utilisation, some marula producers in Zimbabwe like TULIMARA have joined forces with local Non-Governmental Organisations to ultimately ensure that small farmer groups in Zimbabwe are trained in sustainable harvesting, grading and primary processing of the marula fruit and are paid a fair price for their work. These producers pledge to purchase graded marula fruit from the farmer groups which are then processed into various products. The marula nuts are then returned to the farmer groups so that they can extract the valuable marula oil from the nuts. In South Africa there are a number of eco-friendly, low-tech enterprises designed to uplift women in rural communities and provide a sustainable income for families in the tribal lands of the Limpopo valley. Marula products are fairly traded and directly benefit rural villages while encouraging the protection of the marula trees in their natural environment.

The exhibits on show are just few of many commercial products made from Marula:

Marula jelly

SOME PRODUCERS / RETAILERS / DISTRIBUTORS

❖❖❖ Speciality Foods of Africa Pvt Ltd - www.tulimara.co.zw

❖❖❖ Marula Natural Products - www.marula.org.za





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