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agriculture,
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Department:
Agriculture, forestry & fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Scientific name: *Sutherlandia frutescens*
(*Lessertia frutescens*)

Common names: Sutherlandia, cancer bush, balloon pea (English); umnwele, unwele (isiXhosa and isiZulu); kankerbos, blaasbossie, blaas-ertjie, eendjies, gansiekeurtjie, klappers, hoenderbelle-tjie (Afrikaans); phetola (Setswana); lerumo-lamadi (North-Sotho); musa-pelo, motlepelo (Sesotho)

Background

Cancer bush is a hardy perennial shrub. It can grow up to 3 m tall and it is an attractive garden plant. Cancer bush originates in Southern Africa and it is distributed widely in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. In South Africa, the plant is found in the Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape and Mpumalanga provinces.

Climate and soil requirements

Cancer bush grows almost everywhere, however, it prefers full sun, well-drained soils and a location receiving substantial moisture. The optimum day temperature should be about 25 °C. It prefers a soil pH of 7,6 to 8,1 and is susceptible to winter freezing (frost).

Uses

Cancer bush is used as an immune booster in the treatment of HIV/Aids, as a medicine in the treatment of chicken pox, internal cancers, colds, flu, asthma, TB, bronchitis, rheumatism, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, liver problems, haemorrhoids, piles, bladder and uterus problems, women's complaints, diarrhoea, dysentery, stomach ailments, heartburn,

peptic ulcers, backache, diabetes, varicose veins and inflammation. It is also used in the treatment of mental and emotional stress, including irritability, anxiety and depression and it could aid digestion and improve the appetite.

Cultural practices

Planting

Planting should be done in spring or autumn. Seeds should be sown 1 m apart in groups of three to five.

Propagation

Cancer bush plants are propagated from seed and cuttings, although cuttings are difficult to grow.

Fertilisation

The soil mixture should contain two parts sand and one part compost.

Irrigation

The seeds should receive moderate irrigation, e.g. every second day for a week before it is reduced gradually until establishment of the plant.

Weed control

Mulching or compost around the plants will suppress weeds competing with the young plants.

Disease control

Damping off and rot disease could lead to damage to the plants. Control measures to be taken are:

- Sanitation—destroy affected plants

- Avoiding overwatering
- Fungicides can be applied after sowing.

Pest control

There are no known pests that damage cancer bush plants.

Harvesting methods

Cancer bush can be harvested in spring to early summer, preferably in the morning. The leaves can be harvested 3 months after planting and the seeds can be harvested as soon as desiccation of the balloon-like pods occurs (papery state). The entire plant is harvested, using manual or mechanical cutting. The papery skins can be harvested by tearing them.

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