

It's never too late to plant a tree.

It's Spring. The trees herald the change of season by bursting forth with their new foliage, many preceding the soft greens with breathtaking shows of delicate blossoms that produce the fruits and seeds which will be welcomed by man and beast alike in the summer that lies ahead. It's an apt time to celebrate Arbor Day, although perhaps not the best time to plant trees, especially in the Cape with the hot, dry Summer months ahead. The beginning of Winter would be far more appropriate as the Winter rains would enable the root system to establish itself before the growth spurt brought on by the rise in temperature.

No doubt many thousands of trees were planted on 7th September by well-meaning people in the grounds of schools, churches, hospitals, clinics, office blocks, parks and along highways and by-ways around the country. How many of them will be given the care and respect that they need to reach maturity? How many will last long enough to provide homes for birds and beasts in their lofty boughs, or provide us with much sought after protection from the elements all year round? How many will bear fruit? Did you plant a tree?

Around the world, over thousands of years, man has impacted on the great forests by felling huge swathes for living space, fuel, building materials and cropland. Mankind is continuing '*the old, old story*' as told in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* – the earliest recorded story of what happens when forests are cut down. Rivers silt up, the land turns into desert or scrubland; civilisations succumb to environmental degradation. It happened with the Sumerians in the once '*Fertile Crescent*' of Mesopotamia, the Greeks and Romans and many other cultures too. It's happening right now at an ever-increasing pace to match the exponential growth in human populations.

Africa is being hard hit and Thom Hartman, in his book *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight* describes what has happened in the West African country, Burkina Faso. Like Lebanon, where magnificent Cedar forests covered 90% of the land in Gilgamesh's time and where forests were reduced to less than 7% coverage in 1 500 years, this small country has turned into a desert in a generation or so. Burkina Faso has a population explosion. Self-sufficient for tens of thousands of years it now produces only 40% of its food requirements. The thick, impenetrable forests are gone. Wood is used five times faster that it can grow and one Berquinian farmer was quoted – '*In my father's time, millet filled all the granaries and the soil was deeper than your body before you reached rock. Now we have to buy food in all but the wettest years and the soil is no deeper than my hand. When we were boys, the forest was all around us, too thick to penetrate. Gradually more and more of it was cleared around the compounds, until one clearing met the next and made the great openness you now see.*'

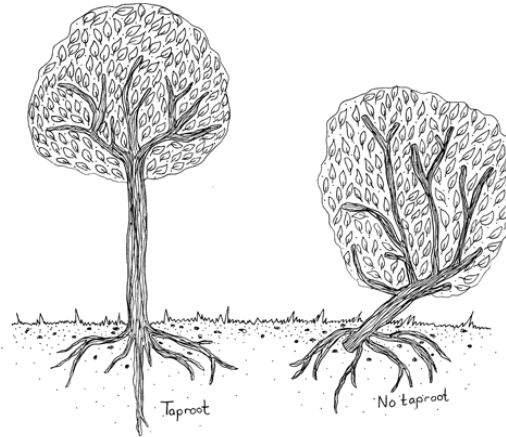
Forty hectares of forest are purported to be cut down every minute of every day. Have we not learnt from the mistakes of past civilisations? Headline news a while back recorded the destruction of hundreds of hectares of forests in Kwa-Zulu Natal. There was discussion of how this would affect the economy. How will impact on us in other ways? Have you given it a thought? Did you plant a tree, or two, on Arbor Day to ensure our survival into the future?

It's not too late, you know. Get out there and dig a hole. Refer back to previous issues of this magazine for instructions on how to go about it. Choose your tree carefully. Plant it with love. Nurture it into the future. And if you're looking for creative, low-cost ideas, here are a few:

- Plant a tree on your birthday.
- Plant one over the festive season, instead of spending your time and money in shopping malls.
- Give trees as gifts to show how much you care.
- Teach other people how to plant and take care of them.
- Save seeds; take cuttings. It will reduce the cost of planting trees. It may take a bit longer, but your patience will be rewarded.

- Plant a tree from a truncheon (small branch or cutting) taken from another tree. It takes a shorter time to grow a tree.

When a tree is propagated from a seed, the growth habit of its stem and root system is different from that of a tree propagated from a cutting.

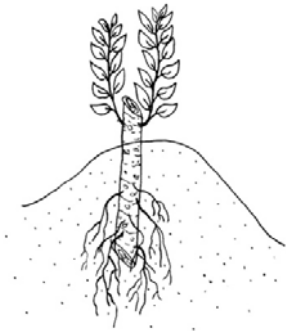


- Trees grown from seed have a tall stem and a deep tap root system.
- Trees grown from a cutting often have a shorter stem (they bush close to the ground) and do not have a tap root.

Planting cuttings or truncheons

Some tips for beginners.

- Bury the cutting about half its length so that there are a few buds above the soil to produce the shoots.
- Keep the soil damp to the depth to which the roots penetrate. Do not let the soil dry out.
- Use hardwood cuttings in winter, and softwood cuttings in spring and summer.



Food from trees

Perhaps one of the best known wild fruits of Africa come from the highly valued Marula (Maroela) tree – *Sclerocarya birrea* - which grows in the bushveld and woodlands from Kwa-Zulu Natal through Swaziland, Botswana, the northern parts of South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The fruits are fairly large sweet-smelling, greenish-yellow berries containing a large, very hard seed. Inside each seed there are three nuts. In late summer the berries ripen and fall to the ground where the strong scent attracts a plethora of wildlife. Reports of intoxicated elephants and baboons are not



uncommon as over-ripe fruits ferment, giving off strong, turpentine-like smells.

The Marula tree belongs to the same family (Anacardiaceae) as the mango, pistachio and cashew nuts, and also the pepper tree (*Schinus molle*) which is so common in the Karoo where it offers weary travellers some respite from the heat at lay-bys along the Great North Road.



Marulas are deciduous trees; they cannot tolerate frost, seldom grow to over 9 m and have spreading crowns with dense, graceful foliage. The delicate, spiky flowers are either male or female (occasionally a bisexual flower is produced) and are usually carried on separate trees. Only rarely do the male flowers produce a fruit.

Insects flock to the flowering trees in summer, their loud humming can be heard some distance away, giving one the feeling of noisy heat.

As a food plant, the Marula is outstanding. The fleshy fruit is tart, thirst-quenching and energy-boosting; it's very rich in Vitamin C - reputedly four times higher than in a normal-sized orange – and even when fermented maintains a good Vitamin C content. By the way, the juice is also claimed to be an aphrodisiac!

The nuts, incredibly difficult to extract from their shells, have a very high energy value, and contain roughly 30% protein and 60% fat; an excellent source of nutrients. They are used by people in many ways, some examples are included in the recipe section that follows.

And now, if you live in the right part of the world and you're lucky enough to have one of these trees in your backyard, here are a few recipes for you to try:

Marula Jelly

2 kg ripe Marula berries
Sugar (heated in oven)

- Halve the berries, press the pips out into a mixing bowl and squeeze the berries hard over a mixing bowl to extract juice.
- Cover the pips and juice with water and turn out into a saucepan (not aluminium).
- Boil for 15 minutes.
- Strain through a nylon sieve lined with damp muslin.
- Use 250 ml heated sugar to 250 ml stock.
- Heat at a low temperature and stir until sugar has melted.

The wonderful Marula tree...

There is little wonder that the Marula tree is held in such high regard as every part of it is used in one way or another. Quite apart from its value as a food to humans, insects and game animals:

- The bark contains an anti-histamine which soothes the blisters caused by hairy caterpillars.
- The timber is fairly light and soft and is used for furniture, panelling, drums, divining bowls and dishes.
- It is used as a prophylactic, to cure malaria, and eye disorders, and also in the practice of magic, right down to the use of the bark from a male or female tree to pre-determine the sex of the unborn child..
- The Zulus and Tongas call it 'the marriage tree'; it is important in fertility rites, and for instilling a baby girl with soft feminine traits.
- The dense crown provides shelter, shade and food for wild animals, and reduces the evaporation of water from holes in the tree trunk.
- The magnificent green lunar moth lays her eggs on the leaves; the caterpillar hatches out, eats and then pupates in large cocoons which are used traditionally, filled with small pebbles, as ankle rattles.
- Marula oil is used in face creams and other body products, including the Enchantrix range.
- The oil is reputed to be a good preservative, and when drizzled onto fresh meat which is then dried and stored, it keeps for up to a year.
- The tree has huge potential as a cultivated, multi-purpose crop.

- Increase temperature and boil for 20 minutes, or until setting point is reached. You can test for this by doing the ‘wrinkle test’. Put a blob of the hot juice onto the back of an ice cube tray. Push with your finger. If the blob wrinkles, it is ready.
- Spoon hot jelly into sterilised jars with screw tops and seal.

This jelly is best served with a rich venison pie or stew.

Marula juice

5 kg ripe Marulas

Sugar

- Pierce the berries so that the juice can escape and place in a saucepan, cover with water and simmer for 20 minutes.
- Strain through a muslin cloth. Don't stir.
- Add 7 cups of sugar for every 10 cups of extract . Add lemon juice to taste.
- Bottle whilst still hot, in sterilised hot bottles.
- Date the bottles and store in a cool, dark place.

Serve with ice in summer.

And then there are some interesting traditional African recipes (gleaned from the ‘*The Evaluation of the Marula Project in Bushbuckridge in Limpopo Province*’, prepared by Felicia Chiloane and Jackson Phala, and which gives many fascinating local uses of the Marula tree)

Xigugu

Put biltong (dried meat) and kernels in a mortar. Stamp until it is well mixed. Remove the mixture and place it in a bowl. Pour a spoon of marula oil over the mixture. It is now ready to be served.

Lekoma

Braai maize meal until it is brownish in colour. Put maize meal into a mortar, add kernels and a bit of salt and sugar. Then stamp all the ingredients until well mixed. Serve.

Morogo (edible herbs)

Cook morogo until ready. Crush kernels with a mortar and pestle. Add the crushed kernels to the morogo. Cook for about 10 – 20 minutes until it is whitish in colour. Keep on stirring the mixture. Then take it off the fire and serve.

Dikokoro

Cook fresh mealie grains until it is well cooked. Add full kernels into the pot. Cook for a few minutes, and serve.

Last, but not least, you could always brew your own beer.

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