**Brachylaena elliptica | Plantz Africa**

**Introduction**

This is an attractive small tree or large shrub with interesting aromatic, dark green foliage with greyish silver undersides.

**Description**

*Brachylaena elliptica* grows into a small tree or a large shrub, 3 to 5 m high, with a spread of up to 2 m. The base can be single- or multi-stemmed. At the young stages of life, the bark is light grey, and matures to brown and becomes rough, as the tree ages.
The leaves are lanceolate and elliptic to ovate, aromatic, dark green and glossy above and with felted hairs and prominent veins on the undersides.

The flowers are small, creamy white, thistle-like blooms, that are in large sprays in spring, from September to October. The fruit is a small nutlet with bristly hairs, occurring from September onwards.

**Conservation Status**

**Status**

This species is not threatened, and is assessed as Least Concern (LC) in the [Red List of](http://pza.sanbi.org/brachylaena-elliptica)
South African plants.

Distribution and habitat

Distribution description

Occurs in coastal bush, on forest margins, on rocky outcrops, in bushveld and grassland, from Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape to KwaZulu-Natal.

Derivation of name and historical aspects

History

*Brachylaena* is a genus of flowering plants in the aster family. All *Brachylaena* species are dioecious, with male and female flowers occurring on separate plants. Many of them come from Madagascar, whereas others are distributed in Africa, especially in the southern regions.

The genus name *Brachylaena* is from the Greek word *brachus*, meaning ‘short’ and *klain*, meaning ‘cloak’ and refers to the short floral bracts surrounding the disc. The species name *elliptica*, is also from a Greek word, *elleiptik*, and refers to the elliptic-shaped leaves.
Ecology

Bees are the main pollinators of this plant. Birds and other small insects are also attracted to this plant

Uses

The leaves have a bitter taste and are sometimes browsed by stock. It is used by Xhosa and Zulu people in traditional medicine. The leaves are used to treat diabetes. An infusion of the leaves provides a gargle and mouthwash to treat sore throats, ulcers of the mouth or throat, quinsy and thrush. The roots are also used as an ingredient in a number of traditional remedies. The wood is durable and poles are suitable for fencing posts, and sticks were used in the past to make fire by friction.

Growing Brachylaena elliptica

Propagate from seed or heel cuttings. The cutting material will do best when treated with a root-stimulating hormone, such as Seradix no. 2, and placed in tray filled with a medium of 50% bark and 50% polystyrene. Cuttings must be placed on a mist bed with rooting taking place from 6 weeks onwards. Plants can be propagated from seed and must be sown in summer.

This plant grows well in sandy and loamy soil in a sunny position. It makes an excellent trimmed hedge. Because the roots are non-invasive, it can also be planted next to walls to cover them. Use in the garden to provide shade. It is also very water-wise, wind and frost-hardy and evergreen.

References


**Credits**

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