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Erythrophysa transvaalensis | Plantz Africa

Introduction

Erythrophysa transvaalensis is an exciting deciduous shrub or small tree, suitable for small gardens in frost-free areas.



Description

Description

Erythrophysa transvaalensis grows up to 4 or 5 m in height with slender stems branching from ground level or just above the base. The bark is brown, smooth and shiny. The stems are slender and brittle.



The graceful leaves are compound, with about 7 pairs of leaflets and a terminal one. They are dark grey-green and crowded at the ends of the branches.



The attractive flowers are produced in erect panicles before or with the new leaves. They are green, suffused with red. The flowers have four clawed petals and straight, protruding stamens. The fruit is a large, balloon-like structure, three-angled, with three chambers; each chamber contains 1 or 2 large, round, smooth black seeds.



Conservation Status

Status

Erythrophysa transvaalensis is listed as a protected tree by the Nature Conservation legislation of South Africa, but it is not listed on the red data list of threatened plants.

Distribution and habitat

Distribution description

This species has a limited distribution in South Africa occurring in Gauteng, Limpopo and the North West Province. It grows in a few places in western Gauteng, on the slope of a hill near the Bospoort Dam in the Rustenburg District, near Thabazimbi, and in the western Waterberg. It was first thought to be endemic to syenite hills (*koppies*) in the Pilanesburg Nature Reserve, but it has been found since in a wider area (Balkwill 1994). I.C. Verdoorn (1942) described one of the original collections as coming from a norite koppie (near Bosport Dam). It also occurs in Limpopo in a few areas including near the Strydom tunnel on dolomite (Pieter Winter pers. comm.). It has also been collected in Zimbabwe.

Derivation of name and historical aspects

History

The genus name *Erythrophysa* is derived from the Greek word *erythros*, red, and *physa* meaning bag, and refers to the red, balloon-like fruits. The specific epithet *transvaalensis* is from the locality name Transvaal. Mr V.K Hands who was the engineer in charge of building Bospoort Dam, sent the first species to the Botanical Research Institute in 1933.

Ecology

Ecology

Balkwill (1994) reported that more research needed to be done to establish what effects fire or soil minerals might have on the distribution of this tree. It is reported to have tuberous roots (Ernst van Jaarsveld pers. comm.). These might have a bearing on its ability to survive fire. It is also reported to occur amongst boulders which might also protect it from veld fires.

Uses

Use

The seeds are reported to be used by African women to make beads. Although this tree has great potential as a garden plant, it is not widely grown at present.

Growing *Erythrophysa transvaalensis*

Grow

Erythrophysa transvaalensis could do well in a big pot and close to a swimming pool. It is easily grown from seed which usually germinate well. Sow the seed immediately on a well-drained soil mix in a seed tray. Cover the seed with a thin layer of fine bark or river sand. Water with a fine nozzle and place the seed tray in a warm position. The seed will take four to six weeks to germinate.

This tree can also be grown from cuttings if seeds prove problematic.

References

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Credits

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