

# Wild medlar



**Scientific name:** *Vangueria infausta*

**Family:** Rubiaceae

**Common names:** Wild medlar, Wildemispel, Mmilo, Muzwilu, Mavelo, Umviyo, Mpfilwa, Umtulwa, Mothwanye, Umvile, Amantulwane.



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## **ORIGIN AND DISTRIBUTION**

Wild medlar is native to Botswana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. It occurs from the Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland, Gauteng, Limpopo and the North West to Northern Cape.

## **PRODUCTION AREAS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Wild medlar is found in the wild in all types of woodlands, especially on rocky ridges and hillsides or in wooded grassland; also near the sea on sand dunes. It is widely distributed in the forests and often found in rocky or sandy places from the Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, Limpopo, North West to Northern Cape provinces.



## DESCRIPTION

Wild medlar is a deciduous tree of up to 3 m to 7 m in height with a short trunk and hanging branchlets. The branchlets are covered with short, woolly hairs.

### Stem

The tree can be single-stemmed or have more than one stem from the base, with the main stem thicker and gnarled to knobby.

### Bark

The bark is greyish to yellowish brown, smooth and peeling in irregular small strips.

### Leaves

Wild medlar leaves are light green in colour, covered with soft, velvety short hairs and they are medium to large (5–10 mm long). The margin of the leaf



is entire. The shape of the leaf is elliptic-pileptic to ovate with the net veining conspicuous below. The leaves often appear twisted and are rough to the touch in older plants.

## Flowers

The flowers are small (about 4 mm long and 6 mm in diameter) greenish white to yellowish in colour and are borne in small, multibranched groups, densely clustered along short, lateral branches.

## Fruit

The fruit is almost round, glossy dark green when young and changing to a light brown when ripe. The ripe fruit is soft and fleshy with a leathery skin. The fruit is usually borne singly or in pairs on twigs below the leaves. The fruit is edible and has a pleasant sweet-sour, mealy taste, like an apple. The dry fruit is leathery and grooved like a pumpkin.

## CLIMATIC AND SOIL REQUIREMENTS

### Temperature

Wild medlar grows best where mean annual temperatures are 17 to 28 °C. The wild medlar is a hardy and drought-resistant plant that can withstand moderate cold.

### Rainfall

The plant can tolerate long periods of drought.

### Soil

The ideal soil for growing wild medlar is red or yellow-red to dark sandy clay loam and brown clay loam. It is also found on red friable clays derived from granites and granodiorite rocks.



## CULTIVATION PRACTICES

### Propagation

Wild medlar can be propagated from seed and cuttings.

### Planting

Wild medlar is planted from November to March and should be spaced at 4,5 m apart. Most of the seed on the ground is parasitised, so collect fruit from the tree and dry in a cool place. Soak seeds overnight and plant the next morning in seedling trays filled with river sand and cover with a thin layer of sand. The germination rate is usually 80% or higher. Transplant the seedlings into nursery bags when they reach the 3-leaf stage. Keep the seedlings in nursery bags at least one year before transplanting them into the garden.

### Irrigation

Although it is drought resistant, water well once you have transplanted it into the garden. Give the plants water frequently for at least the first five weeks.

### Harvesting maturity

Harvesting can be done from late October to early November when fruit is not fully ripe or leave it on the tree until autumn to develop flavour, if there is no danger of frosts. The fruit ripens from January to April. The ripeness is determined by the full development of colour.

## USES

Ripe fruit is edible by both man and wild animals. Fruit is made into a pulp as a substitute for apple sauce in puddings. It is also used for making juice or alcoholic beverage. A type of vinegar can also be produced from the fruit. In some parts of Africa the fruit is stored as dried fruit to be used in time of food scarcity.

An infusion of roots and leaves is reported to treat malaria, and for relief of toothache and chest ailments like pneumonia.

## REFERENCES

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VENTER, F & VENTER, J. 2005. *Making the most of indigenous trees*. Briza, Pretoria, South Africa

[www.operationwildflower.org.za](http://www.operationwildflower.org.za)

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