

African potato is traditionally used as a tonic for fatigue recuperation after a debilitating illness and to enhance your mood. The stems and leaves are mixed with other ingredients to treat prostate problems. Sotho people use African potato as a charm against lightning and storms. The leaves are used to make a rope. The tubers and leaves are used as a dye that gives a black colour, which is used to blacken floors.

Acknowledgement

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- <http://www.plantzafrika.com>
- <http://curriculum.wcape.school.za>

Further information can be obtained from

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Scientific name: *Hypoxis hemmerocallidea*

Common names: Yellow star, Star lily, African potato (English); Sterretjie, Afrika-patat (Afrikaans); Inkomfe, Ilabatheka (isiZulu); Inongwe (isiXhosa); Moli kharatsa, Lotsane (Sesotho)

Background

African potato is a perennial geophytes herb that belongs to the family Hypoxidaceae and is one of the larger species in the genus *Hypoxis*. It is a very attractive, hardy garden plant and originates from Southern Africa. It is found in open grassland and woodland. The plant is common in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Gauteng, North-West and Free State provinces, as well as in Swaziland and Lesotho.

Climate and soil requirements

The plant prefers full sunlight. Only a few species grow on cliff faces or in the forests. It grows well in warm and cold subtropical areas. African potato is planted in different soil types, although well-drained soil is needed.

Cultural practice

Soil preparation

Soil preparation is adapted to the method of harvesting, irrigation practices and the contour of the land. The field should be ploughed into long rows of mounds.

Propagation

Propagation of the plants is done from seed, tissue cultures and bulbs. Seeds should be collected just before the capsules open. They can be treated with fungicide and boiling water before planting into compost-rich soil. Germination can take up to a year. Seedlings should be left for a year before transplanting. Corm division is a more rapid and successful method of propagating the plants. For best results, seeds should be kept cold for six to eight weeks (mixed

with vermiculite in the refrigerator) before sowing in well-prepared seed boxes.

Planting

Seeds should be sown in early spring and should be planted 1mm deep and covered with fine grass compost. One-year-old corms need less space to be planted (10 cm apart in rows and 20 cm between the rows). If the intention is to leave it to grow for more than three years, the spacing should be increased (20 cm apart in rows with 50 cm between rows) to accommodate the large size.

Fertilisation

No chemical additives, chemical fertilisers or insecticides are used in the cultivation of African potato.

Irrigation

The soil should be kept moist, but not wet with good ventilation and low humidity. The plants should be irrigated weekly–25 mm irrigation per week for the first three months of plantation is required. In cool climates the plants must be kept dry during winter. African potato is extremely hardy and drought-resistant.

Pest control

African potato is inhabited with termites and other pests such as American bollworm, spotted maize beetle, stink

bug and grasshopper. Porcupines dig up the corms and centipedes eat the outer covering. Application of registered pesticides is recommended for most of the abovementioned pests.

Disease control

The leaves of this plant die back in winter. Registered chemical control agents can be used when the disease is severe. Good sanitary practices are the best way to control dieback because the fungus lives inside the plant and cannot be completely controlled by fungicide spray.

Harvesting method

African potato can be harvested in summer when the plants are actively growing. Harvesting takes place throughout the year once the corms have reached a weight of 250 g. A handpick method is used to harvest the plant.

Uses

African potato is used as a medicine that can prevent rheumatoid arthritis, heart disease, cancer, lung ailments and even Yuppie flu. It is an immune booster for people living with HIV/Aids and can also be used to treat dizziness, heart weakness, nervous disorder, bladder disorders, insanity, testicular tumours, prostate hypertrophy and urinary infections. In times of famine the rootstocks are boiled or roasted for food and the juice is applied to burns. Boiled in water,

