

12 edible indigenous South African plants

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The [Botanical Society of South Africa](#) encourages indigenous gardening, awareness about conservation, and the wise use of indigenous plants in southern Africa. [Good Hope Garden Nursery](#) shared some great tips on indigenous plants that you can easily grow and harvest in your very own garden for medicinal remedies and exciting culinary experiences.

We have a treasure trove of edible and medicinal plants within our rich plant kingdom in South Africa. It is important to know what part of the plant to use and how it can be used for culinary concoctions; some are edible only in certain seasons or after certain preparations. Below are a selection of a few of my favourite, pretty well-known wild flavours that are popular among landscapers so you may even have some growing!

Planting these indigenous edibles into your garden gives you easy access to fresh flavours that, at the same time, can handle our harsh South African climate as they are water-wise and easier to maintain than your classic herb or veg. This makes it that much simpler to connect to your food and the rhythm of nature in a fresh and wild way, and enjoy playing with new recipes using these ingredients picked on your doorstep. The local birds, bees and insects will be grateful too.

1. *Pelargonium culallatum* (wild malva)

- The leaves of this plant diffused into tea can be used to treat stomach disorders.
- Bruised leaves can be used as a poultice for sores and wounds, and a rolled-up fresh leaf inserted in the ear (not too deep) can help earache.
- Add the leaves to your bath for a fragrant relaxing soak to relieve tired muscles.
- Tickle your salads and baked goods pink with the flowers of the wild malva.



This showy pelargonium grows up to a metre, and flowers beautifully in post-fire years. It grows best in a sunny position in well-drained soil, and looks best if pruned after flowering to prevent it getting leggy.



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2. *Pelargonium tomentosum* (peppermint-scented pelargonium)

Peppermint pelargonium is high in essential oils.

- Use the flowers in salads and to decorate cakes.
- Simmer leaves in milk, strain and use in baking or as teas.
- Makes a delicious flavouring for ice-cream.

– The leaves can be crushed and used to soothe bruises by adding the leaves to your bath or as a poultice.

A shady position, compost and a bit of water in summer will keep this fast-growing pelargonium happy. One plant can cover 0.75m².





3. *Coleonema pulchellum* (confetti bush)

- Traditionally used as a deodoriser, add this to potpourri
- This aromatic herb can be used in sweet or savoury dishes – just strip the little leaves off the stems as one would do with thyme.





Known as false buchu, this lovely shrub grows to one metre or more in height and width. They like well-drained soil and a bit of compost, and they prefer a sunny position although they do tolerate light shade. As with all fynbos, a mulch of compost or bark is beneficial as it keeps the shallow root system cool. It responds well to pruning.



4. *Oxalis pes-caprae* (wild sorrel)

The whole plant is edible and it has a nice sharp taste. It is sour due to the oxalic acid content so don't eat too much.

- The flowers can be used in salads and the heart-shaped leaves used as a garnish in salads and dips.
- The stalks and roots can be eaten raw or cooked in milk. Traditionally *oxalis* is used as an ingredient in 'waterblommetjie stew' and as a salt substitute.



We all take this lovely spring flower for granted. It occurs naturally in the Western Cape and doesn't have to be planted. It regrows from little underground corms as soon as the rains start. It responds well to a bit of compost and a sunny position although a bit of shade doesn't stop them from flowering. They die down at the end of spring.



5. *Artemesia afra* (African wormwood)

- The wormwood is used medicinally to treat fever, colds, flu, sore throats, coughs, asthma, pneumonia and headaches.
- The bruised leaves can be used as a poultice for sores and wounds, and a rolled-up fresh leaf inserted in the ear (not too deep) can also help earache.

- The leaves have a very strong flavour so use sparingly, but it makes a great addition to iced tea and herbal drinks.
- Crush for a beautiful flavour addition to cocktails.



© Sitaara Stodel

This hardy shrub has delicate looking foliage and can be used effectively in a herbaceous border. It is easy to grow, drought resistant and responds well to being composted. It should be pruned hard after flowering to keep it looking good. Excellent garden plant.



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6. *Carissa macrocarpa* (num-num)

The beautiful berries of the num-num can be eaten as a fruit as they are very high in vitamin C and pectin.

- Excellent for making jam and preserves.

- They impart a gorgeous ruby red hue to syrups and cordials.

This is a fairly slow growing summer rainfall coastal shrub that grows best in a nutrient-rich soil. It is often used as a windbreak or a security hedge plant, but also stands very well on its own. It is drought resistant and grows up to two metres. The num-num has wonderful white flowers in spring and summer, which are followed by the delicious fruit.



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7. *Tulbachia violacea* (wild garlic)

The whole plant is edible.

- The flowers can be used in salads and as garnish.
- The leaves can be used like chives or as an insect repellent.
- The roots have a very pungent garlic flavour (so use them sparingly) and can be used like normal garlic. They are particularly great in stews and roasts.
- A tea made from the roots or leaves are good for coughs and colds, and it has similar medicinal properties to normal garlic.



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© Juliette Decombes

This excellent border plant has bluish green leaves. It flowers profusely if watered through the summer months with attractive mauve flowers. It is easy to grow and is reported to keep moles away. It occurs naturally along the south coast.

8. *Jasminum multipartitum* (many-petalled jasmine)

This has a wonderfully perfume scented, delicate white star flower that is used cosmetically and in potpourri.

- Use the flowers in salads, in baking, in teas or as a flavouring.
- Makes a beautiful garnish but discolours quickly so it has to be used fresh and fast.



There are two forms of this plant – a scrambling shrub or a creeper. Both have beautifully scented large white jasmine flowers with a pink reverse from August to November. They are naturally widespread in summer rainfall areas. They will grow in sun or semi-shade and can tolerate wind.

9. *Carpobrotus edulis* (sour figs)

- The succulent leaves are excellent for skin problems like sunburn, bee and blue bottle stings, rashes, cold sores and insect bites.
- Chew on the leaves for sore throat relief.
- The fruits have a tamarind-tasting juicy seed centre and are used to make jams, chutneys and sauces.
- The pink flowers produce a sweeter tasting fruit than the yellow flowers.



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This fast growing succulent ground cover flowers from August to October. The large flowers are yellow but turn pink with age. It is widespread in the south Western Cape where it is used as a pioneer plant to hold banks and exposed sand.



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10. *Mentha longifolia* (balderjan)

- Use medicinally as a tea for stomach disorders as this plant has calming properties similar to exotic mint.
- Good for flavouring in baking, jams, syrups and in salads.

– Can be used as normal mint for culinary uses.



© Claire McNulty



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This easy-to-grow herb is found naturally from the Cape all the way to Lesotho. It grows in damp areas in sun and light shade.

11. *Salvia africana lutea* (aromatic sage) (salie)

- This sage can be used medicinally as a tea for coughs, colds and stomach ailments.
- A delicious herb in cooking as it works well with veg and pasta dishes, chicken, in sauces, stews and roasts. Add a sprig and fish it out later as it imparts a delicious flavour but is bitter to eat.
- Dry the leaves and store in a glass jar in your spice cupboard or add it to a salt mix.
- Use the flowers as a garnish in salads.

It is a hardy coastal shrub and grows in sandy coastal soils. It forms a good windbreak and is an excellent pioneer plant. It is covered in orange blooms with darker bracts in the early spring.

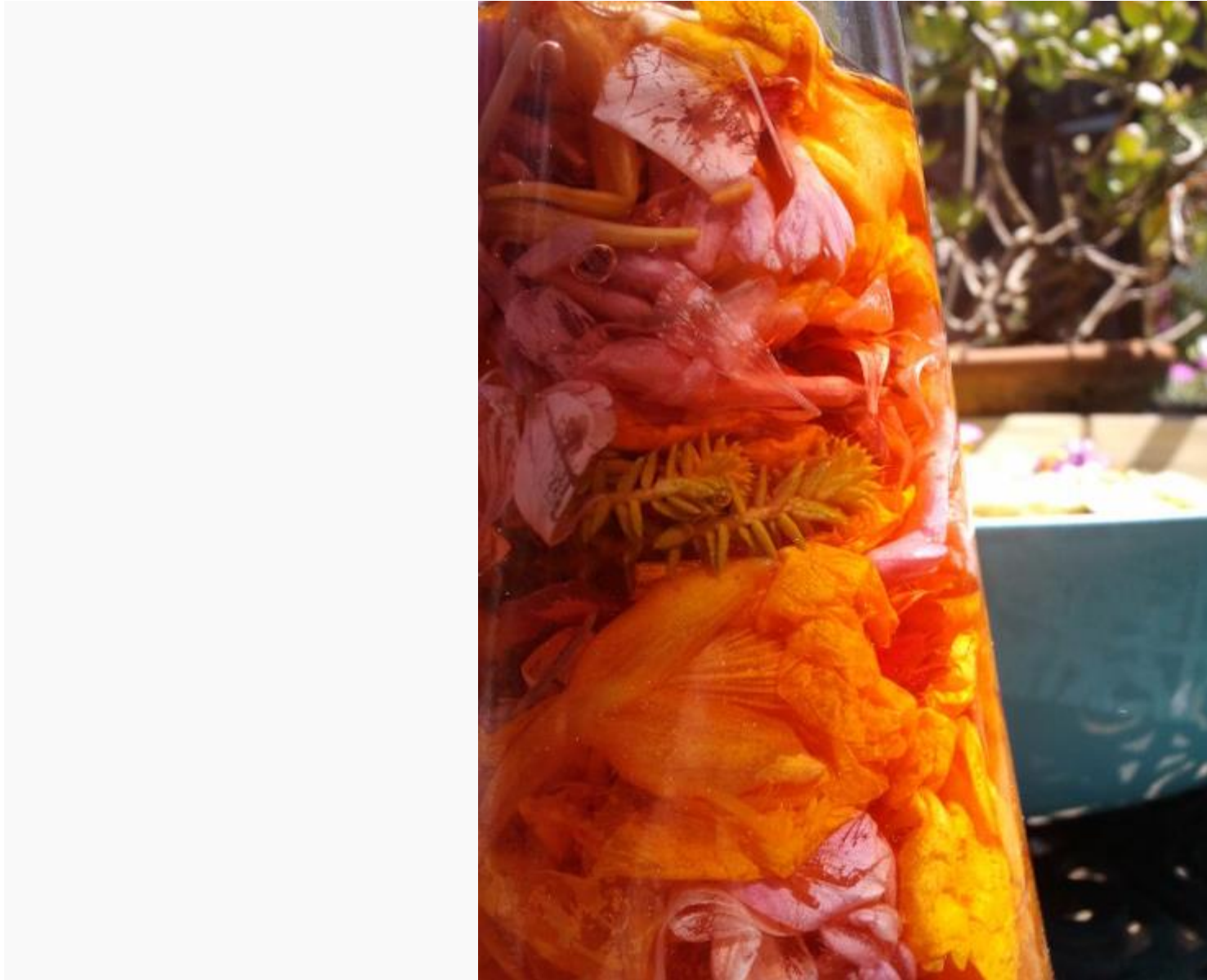


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12. *Agathosma apiclata* (garlic buchu)

Possesses a strong garlic scent and high in essential oils.

- Adds a garlic flavour to cooking and baking.
- Good for flavouring vinegars and oils.



This metre-high, hardy shrub grows in coastal dunes and limestone soils of the Southern Cape giving the ‘holiday’ smell to the Knysna area. It prefers a sunny position and is covered in white flowers in late winter.



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- See more at: <http://africageographic.com/blog/12-edible-indigenous-south-african-plants/#sthash.wZpJtWCP.dpuf>