



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Sustainable harvesting of plants utilised for medicinal purposes

Despite the enormous richness in plant species, relatively few of these plants are economically utilised. Business ventures that have developed from the use of indigenous plants are the trade in medicinal and cultural plants, food crops, and ornamental plants. Although indigenous wood has been previously used, the source is almost depleted and today these wood types are utilised on a limited scale. South Africa beholds her indigenous plants as a valuable natural resource and accepts responsibility to conserve the unique flora.

Plants were once a primary source of all the medicines in the world and they still continue to provide mankind with new remedies. Well-known examples of plant-derived medicines include quinine, morphine, codeine, aspirin, atropine and reserpine. South Africa's best known contributions to world medicine include the Cape aloes (*Aloe ferox*), buchu (*Agathosma betulina*) and devil's claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*).

Due to the value of these plants, people do not only utilise them for personal use, but have realised the opportunity commercialise the use of these plants. Based on this, the Department has initiated a project to investigate sustainable harvesting levels and optimal harvesting techniques and intervals in order to ensure survival of these plants and sustainability.



Officials measuring tree diameter at breast height

The present study focuses on the five tree species most commonly utilised for bark harvesting in the area. These include *Strychnos decussate*, *Protorhus longifolia*, *Rapanea melanophloeos*, *Cassipourea flanaganii* and *Curtisia dentate*. A total of six research plots were established in 2005 in the Amatole forest range and Port St Johns. The recovery rate as well as diameter at breast height is measured for each experimental tree. The monitoring and measurements of the research plots are ongoing.

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