

Nuxia congesta

Family : Buddlejaceae

Common names : common wild elder, brittle wood (Eng.); gewone wildevlier (Afr.); umKhobesza (Xhosa); isiPhofane (Zulu)

National Tree List No. 633



Nuxia congesta is a winter-flowering evergreen tree or shrub with beautiful large heads of small, scented, long-lasting white or cream flowers. It is an excellent focal plant for a small garden and is easy to keep in shape.

Description

Nuxia congesta is a quick-growing, evergreen tree or shrub, 2–20 m high. It has a pale grey-brown to dark brown shedding bark and hairy branchlets. The leaves are hairy, dark green, slightly leathery and variable in shape and size. They are found clustered at the ends of branchlets. Coppice leaves are soft, succulent and dark green with a serrated margin. The flowers are small, about 5 mm long, tubular and creamy white, often tinged with mauve or purple, especially in bud. They are sweetly scented and arranged in often large congested, mushroom-shaped or flat-topped heads, at the ends of the branchlets. The fruits are small, about 3 mm long, hairy and brownish. They develop within the persistent calyx and contain fine, inconspicuous seed. Flowering time: February–November.



Nuxia congesta flower heads



Nuxia congesta trunk with a shedding bark

Distribution and habitat

Nuxia congesta naturally occurs in dry rocky grasslands, bushveld and on the margins of forests in Limpopo, North West, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape. It is also found in Swaziland, Botswana, and Mozambique, extending northwards to Ethiopia.

Derivation of name and historical aspects

The genus *Nuxia* was named after M. de la Nux, a French amateur botanist on Réunion Island; and the specific name *congesta* refers to the crowded heads of flowers. *Nuxia congesta* is sometimes mistaken for *Nuxia glomerulata*, the leaves of which are more elliptic, leathery and glabrous. This species has a restricted distribution between Pretoria and Zeerust.

Ecology

The brittle wood's lovely scented flowers attract a parade of bees and butterflies to the garden. And these in turn attract insect-eating birds.



Bee pollinating *Nuxia congesta* flowers

Uses and cultural aspects

This *Nuxia*, has a hard and durable whitish yellow wood, which is used for fence posts and for fuel.