

## Afrocarpus falcatus – Outeniqua Yellowwood

Outeniqua Yellowwood is a fast-growing, majestic conifer from South Africa that is found naturally in coastal and montane forests from the Cape of Good Hope northwards to the Limpopo and also eastwards to Mozambique. The yellowwoods in general are regarded as South Africa's national tree, although sometimes *Podocarpus latifolius* is singled out for this honour.

Outeniqua yellowwood is tall, evergreen tree growing from 10 to 25m in height although in ideal conditions in the wild it can 60m with a clean bole of more than 20m and a girth of up to 7m. It has an elegant, full-crowned shape. The leaves are arranged spirally, with parallel veins and smooth margins. The leaf tip is sharply pointed. A new flush of bluish-grey leaves in spring contrasts beautifully against the older, dark green, mature leaves. The bark is interesting, being smooth and ridged on younger stems and peeling off in flakes on the older trees. Male and female cones occur on different trees. The large, yellow, fleshy fruits take a year to ripen and hang from the branches in clusters.

It has an elegant shape is certainly a tree for all seasons and all gardens. It is an excellent container plant and can also be decorated and used as an indoor Christmas tree.

In its natural habitat this is an ecologically important tree with its ripe fruits are eaten by bats, bushpigs, fruit-eating birds (Cape Parrots, Purple-Crested, Knysna and Ross's Louries, Rameron, African Green and Delagorgue's Pigeons). The large, dense crown is often a roosting and nesting site for various birds.

Yellowwood is an excellent container plant and can also be decorated and used as an indoor Christmas tree.

It is a valuable timber source. The wood is used extensively for furniture, roof beams, floorboards, door and window frames and boat building. Some of the famous yellowwood antiques seen throughout South Africa were made from the wood of this specific tree. The straight stems of these trees were once used for the topmasts of ships. The bark is used for tanning leather. Favourable trials as a commercial timber plantation species have been run in South Africa with the growth rate and quality of the wood comparing favourably to that of commercial pine.

### Propagation

Propagation is straight-forward from fresh seed. No pre-treatment of clean seed is required. Seed can be sown directly into black nursery bags or into deep seed trays using a mixture of well-rotted compost and washed river sand (1:1). The seed must be pushed and bedded into the mixture and covered with a light layer of soil. The mixture must stay moist at all times. Some of the seed may take up to six months to germinate, so be patient. Seedlings can be pricked out at a height of 50-80mm and planted into bags or pots. Care must be taken not to damage the taproot as this may slow the initial growth rate of the plant.