

Virgilia divaricata – Cape Lilac

Virgilia divaricata, commonly known as the Cape Lilac or Tree in a Hurry, from the South African Cape is a very beautiful, fast growing evergreen tree for coastal areas. Growing from 3 to 4m in height, it has a rounded habit with relatively horizontal branches clothed in fern-like foliage.

The bark is silver-grey and smooth in young trees; as the tree gets older the bark turns grey and rough. In Spring and early Summer it produces a great display of showy, fragrant, pea-shaped, purple-pink flowers borne in dense terminal sprays about 100 mm long.

Flowers produce copious nectar are rich in nectar and attract many nectar seeking birds and insects. Blooms are followed by velvety, flat brown seed pods from 50-80 mm long that become black with age. The tree is a food source for many South African native butterflies.

Propagation

Virgilia is propagated from seed. The seed coat is hard and requires some stimulation to initiate germination. Seeds can be soaked in hot water before sowing, or the seed coat can be cracked artificially. They also respond to stimulation by fire and can be treated with the smokewater seed should be sown in autumn or spring, in well-drained soil at a depth of 0.5 - 1cm and covered with the sowing medium or milled bark and then watered.

Seed can also be sown in situ, e.g. for forest rehabilitation projects. The seeds are highly fertile and can remain viable for many years.

Transplant the seedlings after the first pair of true leaves has emerged when they are large enough to handle. *Virgilia* seedlings grow fast and can be planted into pots or bags for growing on, or directly into their permanent position in the garden. Feed moderately with a liquid fertiliser and water generously. Plant the young trees into a permanent location in full sun or semi-shade. They need good, light soil and plenty of water, particularly during their first 2 to 6 years. *Virgilia*s have strongly spreading surface roots and are greedy feeders; they will benefit from frequent generous applications of compost or organic mulch. *Virgilia*s are sensitive to frost, particularly when young. Mature trees may withstand short periods of frost, but not prolonged exposure to freezing temperatures.