

## Bolusanthus speciosus – Tree Wisteria

A tree that is indigenous to Southern Africa, and more commonly known as the Wild/Tree Wisteria.

This beautiful species occurs in the Northern Province, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland and Zimbabwe in a variety of habitats.

**Height:** In the wild this is a small deciduous tree, 7m - 12 m tall, sometimes up to 18m, usually multi-stemmed with an erect, slender growth form.

**Bark:** On older trees the bark is brown to blackish-brown and deeply longitudinally fissured.

**Leaves:** The leaves have a smooth-edged margin, slightly and irregularly scalloped. They are alternate, compound with 3-7 pairs of leaflets plus a terminal leaflet present. Markedly asymmetric at the base, but broadly tapering and rounded with a narrowly tapering apex. They are yellowish green, with the midrib and lateral veins pale yellowish and conspicuous, bright shiny green above and dull green below.

**Flowers:** Beautiful pea-shaped, pale blue to violet in colour arranged in long drooping bunches. Bunches of flat non-splitting pods persist on the tree for a long time after flowering. Flowering September to October extending sometimes into November and even on to December or January.

**Fruit:** A flat narrow pod about 7-10cm in length with a light brown or straw colour, but sometimes they may even be grey or even blackish with age. Fruit usually appears February to March.

The Tree Wisteria thrives in a variety of environments but does not like cool wet Summers. This tree seems to be a fragile and delicate tree, but the appearance belies the facts. It occurs in gardens in Southern Africa which receive some moderate frost during winter, and it can survive long periods of drought. The wood of the tree is also borer and termite resistant. The seeds germinate readily, but the seedlings do not transplant easily. However, given a good well-drained soil and a sunny position free from frost, they can be fast growing.

### Propagation

To propagate, pour boiling water over the seeds and when it has cooled fractionally, soak the seed. This causes the seed coat to fracture and the seed to absorb water. The seed should swell. If this does not happen initially, repeat the process. Scarification is standard pre-treatment for hard coated seeds such as pea and acacia species.

Sow the seeds in containers filled with river sand, covering lightly with finer sand. Remember that the sowing depth should not be deeper than the diameter of the seed. The seeds germinate quickly at a temperature of 22°C plus and seedlings can be transplanted after the second leaf has emerged. A good soil mixture would be equal parts of river sand, loam and compost. With good care this tree can grow up to 800mm per year.

*Bolusanthus speciosus* can withstand moderate frost but will need protection for the first few years. It can also survive periods of drought.



LOWLY GREEN AND FEELING SLOW

