Burchellia bubalina | Plantz Africa

Introduction

The wild pomegranate is an attractive ornamental shrub/tree that is also used to attract nectar-feeding birds. The combination of its bright red flowers with the glossy, dark green leaves, creates a beautiful display in the small garden, both in shade and in full sun.

Description

B. bubalina is a shrub or a small tree that grows up to 8 m tall. It grows naturally in forests, forest margins, rocky outcrops and bush clumps in montane grasslands.

The wild pomegranate has a smooth, grey-brown bark that becomes rougher with age. The tree bears new twigs that are always covered with hairs. The dark green, glossy, opposite leaves are hairless above and paler below, with fine soft hairs along the vein. Leaves are soft when young, becoming thickly leathery as they age.
In early spring to mid-summer, the tree bears bright red to orange flowers in dense terminal clusters, and are followed by green, urn-shaped fruits that are also borne in dense clusters. The fruits are crowned with distinctive horn-like calyx lobes. The fruits turn brown as they ripen and then become woody, remaining on the tree for many months.

**Distribution and habitat**

**Distribution description**

The wild pomegranate grows naturally along the coastal strip of South Africa, from the Western Cape through to KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Limpopo Province. It is also found in Swaziland.

**Derivation of name and historical aspects**

**History**

The tree was named after W.J. Burchell, the early explorer and naturalist in South Africa who was the author of *Travels in the interior of South Africa*, a book that was published in 1822. The species name *bubalina* is a Latin word meaning buff-coloured, possibly referring to the yellowish hairs found on some forms of this tree. This also refers to the buffalo-like horns of the mature calyx that, in this plant, is found on the fruits.

This is a monotypic genus (only one species). It belongs to the coffee family, Rubiaceae, with over 500 genera and approximately 7000 species that are found mostly in the tropics. The members range from herbs to climbers as well as large trees. They are characterized by their opposite, entire leaves, with inter-petiolar stipules.

**Uses**

**Use**

This is a neat and attractive ornamental subject for most gardens. With the flowers containing sweet nectar, it is also good for attracting birds to the garden. When the tree is in full bloom, it bears a superficial resemblance to the true pomegranate, hence the common name, wild pomegranate.

*B. bubalina* has a hard, dense and close-grained wood which is used to build huts. The wood is also used to make agricultural implements, like hoe handles and cattle yokes. Roots are taken as an emetic to cleanse the body. Roots are sometimes used in conjunction with some other plant parts to concoct a love charm. Combination of both bark and roots make suitable splints for binding fractured limbs of animals.

**Growing Burchellia bubalina**

**Grow**
Wild pomegranate is easily propagated from seed or cuttings. Seeds can be harvested in October and should be sown straight after harvesting. They take about four to six weeks to germinate. Young plants must be protected from frost. When planted out, it initially prefers rich loam soil, with additions of some compost. The plant can also be propagated from half-ripe (semi-hardwood) cuttings that are taken in spring or in autumn. They take about three to four weeks to root, and then can be transplanted to containers with potting soil for hardening off, before planting out in the garden. It grows and flowers best in full sun, but also thrives in dense shade. It should be protected from very cold winter winds and extreme frost, as this might damage or kill the plant.

References


Credits

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