

National & Culturally Important Plants of Commonwealth Countries: Africa



BOTSWANA

The **Doum** or **Gingerbread Palm** is used for food and wine, to make mats, baskets and buildings
Hyphaene thebaica



CAMEROON

Okok or **Eru** is an important wild forest food in Cameroon which is being domesticated in several regions
Gnetum species
(photograph Ollivier Girard CIFOR)



GHANA

Kola nuts are used as stimulants, flavourings and medicines. They come from the kola tree which grows in the tropical rainforests of Central and Western Africa. The nuts are chewed and used in welcoming and wedding ceremonies.
Cola nitida

Photograph (Kew Gardens)



KENYA

The distinctive **umbrella acacia thorn** of the savannah is Kenya's national tree. There were 6 candidates to find a national flower
Acacia tortilis (National Plant)

Mgunga or mugumba or munga (Swahili)



LESOTHO

The beautiful, geometric **spiral aloe** only grows in the Drakenberg mountains of Lesotho and is threatened by over collection for sale as an ornamental
Aloe polyphylla (National Plant)

Lekhala kharatsa (Sesotho)
Kroonwaalwyn (Afrikaans)



MALAWI

The **Mulanje Cedar** or **Cypress** only grows in the Mulanje Mountains. It is used for local arts & crafts, fishing boats and decoration for important buildings. It is endangered.
Widdringtonia whytei (National Plant)



MAURITIUS

The Boucle d'Oreille is a beautiful silver leaved shrub which only grows wild on Le Morne Brabant mountain in Mauritius. It has been the national plant since 1992.

Trochetia boutoniana (National Plant)

Photo Credit Tony Rodd



MOZAMBIQUE

The slow growing **Mwenje** (Sneezewort) tree of Mozambique takes 50 to 60 years to reach maturity. It is used to make timbilia musical instruments. It is increasingly rare.

(Photo copyright VJM Mozambique)



NAMIBIA

The **Welwitschia** is an ancient plant which grows only in the Namib desert between Namibia and Angola. There are both male and female plants. Individual plants can live for one or two thousand years.

Welwitschia mirabilis (National plant)

Kharos or Khurub (Nama); Nyanka (Damara); Onyanga (Herero); Tweeblaarkanniedood (Afrikaans)



NIGERIA

The **costus** plant is a beautiful yellow flowered member of the ginger family. It is the national plant of Nigeria and features on the coat of arms.

Costus spectabilis (National Plant)

Photograph S Dondeyne (Flora of Zimbabwe)



RWANDA

The **Umwungu** tree reaches about 20 meters high and is often used for carving beer mugs and musical instruments such as the ennanga (a type of zither) and drums.

Polyscias fulva



SEYCHELLES

The Tropicbird Orchid is the floral emblem of the Seychelles Islands. The long trailing spines look like the tails of tropical birds. This orchid grows only in the Seychelles.

Angraecum eburneum (National Plant)



SIERRA LEONE

There is a historic Cottonwood Tree in the centre of Free Town. This is the tree where the freed slaves gave thanks when they landed in 1792 to establish their country.

Ceiba pentandra



SOUTH AFRICA

The large and beautiful King Protea grows only in South Africa and is the largest of the proteas. The national tree is the Real Yellowwood.

Protea cynaroides (National Plant)

Podocarpus latifolius (National Tree)



SWAZILAND

There is a rare Swaziland heather which grows only in the high veld of Swaziland.

Erica swaziensis

Photograph copyright Linda Loffler (Swaziland Flora Database)



TANZANIA

Mpingo or African Blackwood is an important timber tree used for wood carving and making instruments including clarinets, oboes and bagpipes. It is threatened by unsustainable harvesting.

Dalbergia melanoxylon (National Plant)



UGANDA

Omutuba or tree bark cloth making is a tradition recognised by UNESCO. The bark is stripped from the mutuba tree and pounded.

Ficus natalensis

Photograph (UNESCO)



ZAMBIA

Bougainvillea plants are native to South America but are naturalised in many parts of the world including Zambia, where it is the national plant.

Bougainvillea spectabilis

Plantlife would like to thank Alan Hamilton for his suggestions on culturally important plants and trees in Africa