

# Indigenous food crops

## 1. What are indigenous food crops?

Indigenous food crops refer to crops that have their origin in South Africa. Added to these crops are those that were introduced into the country and are now recognised as naturalised or traditional crops. These crops are produced and found growing in the country under various weather conditions with many found in the wild. They are divided into three categories; namely grains, vegetables and fruit.

### 1.1 Indigenous grain crops

Indigenous grain crops can be defined as any crop yielding starch and protein-enriched seeds suitable for food. These crops are further subdivided into cereals and pulses.

**Cereals:** millet

**Pulses:** cowpea, Bambara groundnut

### 1.2 Indigenous vegetable crops

Indigenous vegetable crops are defined as crops from which the tender leaves, stems and petioles are harvested and used in the preparation of vegetables. These crops are subdivided into roots/tubers and leafy.

**Leafy:** cleome, cowpea, amaranth, blackjack, Jews mallow

**Roots/tubers:** cassava, amadumbe, marama bean, living potato

### 1.3 Indigenous fruit crops

Indigenous fruit crops are fruit types that are found diversely in the wild in South Africa. They are the seed-associated structures of certain plants that are sweet and edible in the raw state. Examples of fruit are marula, wild apricot, wild plum, raisin bush, sour plum.

## 2. Major production areas in South Africa

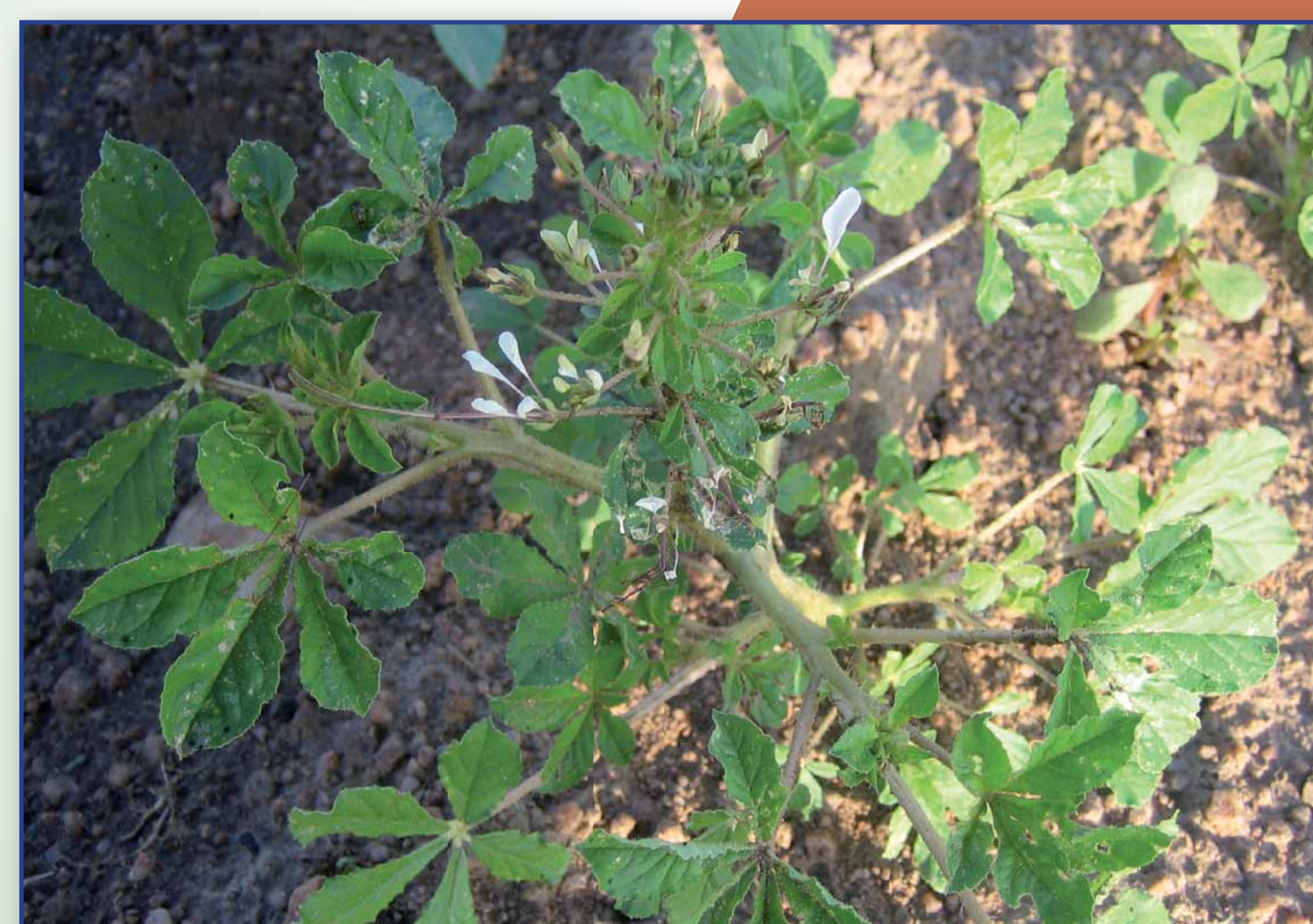
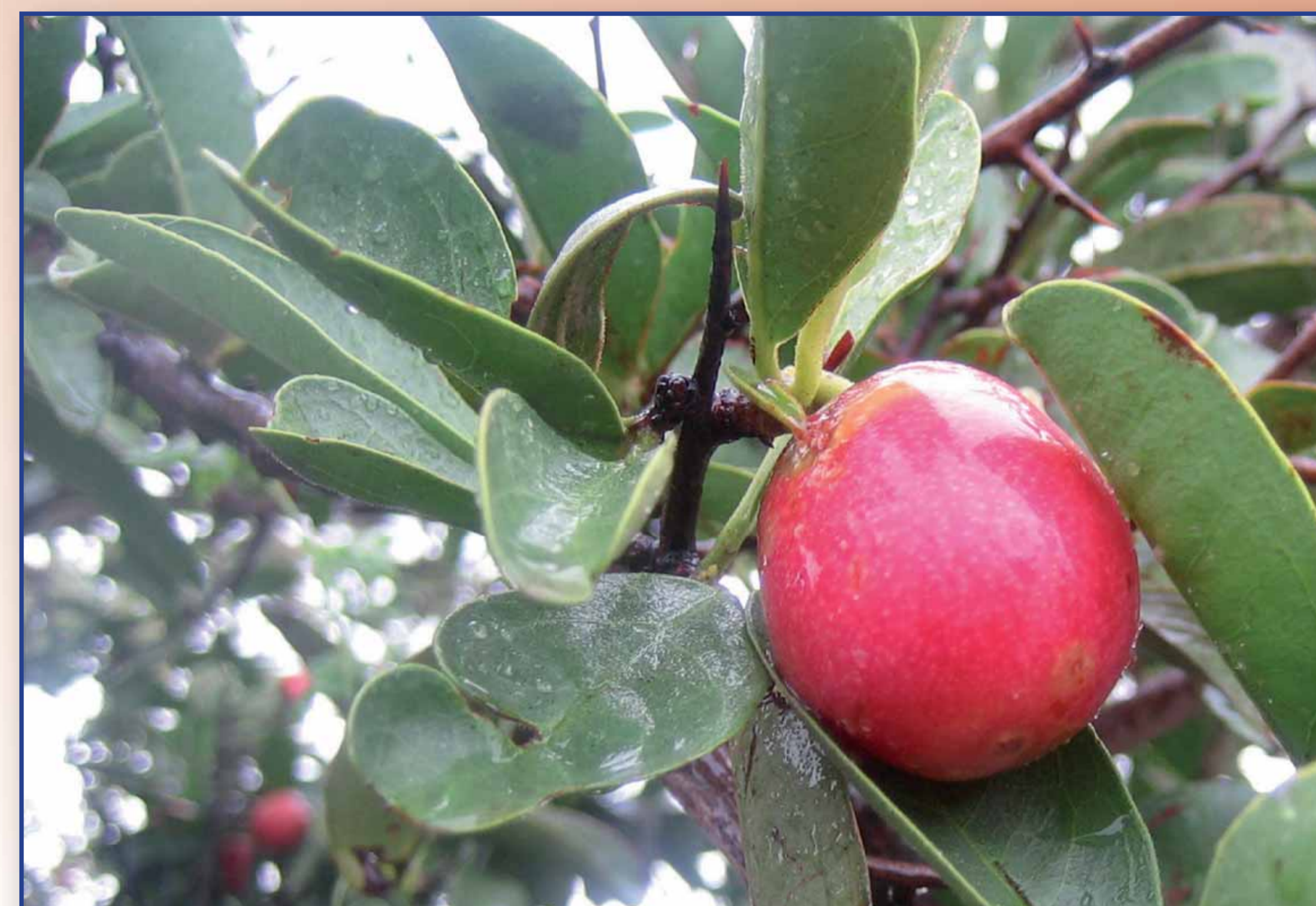
- Bambara groundnut, cowpea: Mpumalanga, North West, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces.
- Cleome, Jews mallow, amaranthus: Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Gauteng provinces.
- Marula, sour plum, wild plum: Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Eastern Cape provinces.

## 3. Uses of indigenous food crops

- Leaves, corms and shoots are eaten as boiled, dried, sometimes roasted vegetables. These are also used as relish and in soups.
- Immature pods are dried or boiled while immature seeds are ground to make flour.
- Tubers are used as food substitutes for starch-enriched food such as rice and maize meal.
- Fruit types are eaten in ripened or dried form or nuts and can be processed into jam, jelly and juice.

## 4. Advantages of growing indigenous crops

- Low input requirements
- Highly nutritious
- Resistant to drought, pests and diseases
- Better adapted to marginal areas than exotic crops



### References

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3. Jansen van Rensburg, 2007. *African leafy vegetables in South Africa.* Water SA, Vol. 33 No. 3
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