

a year. The gathering of material from natural field populations often takes days, because the plants are harvested in mountainous regions. These areas are often inaccessible by normal transport.

Harvesting methods

Different harvesting methods/practices are used:

- Harvesting of only the young growth.
- Cutting of the tea as low as possible from the ground with a sickle or pruning-shears.
- Cutting the plants approximately 0,33 m from the ground.
- Using mechanised fodder cutters to increase productivity and to deliver a more uniform product.

Uses

Human consumption

The leaves and stem of the honeybush are used to make a beverage and a medicinal/herbal tea. Honeybush extracts can potentially be used as flavourings in ready-to-drink beverages such as ice tea, fruit juice blends and sweets.

Medicinal uses

Honeybush tea is used for regulation of menstruation cycles and prevention of breast, prostate and uterus cancer. It also reduces the risk of osteoporosis, works against kidney poisoning, lowers cholesterol levels and has positive effects on the urinary system. It also aids weak digestion without affecting the heart. The tea is often administered to babies and children with stomach problems. The lack of caffeine could contribute to the calming effect of the tea and can help to combat sleeplessness (insomnia). A decoction of the tea has been used as a restorative and as an expectorant in cases of chronic catarrh and pulmonary disease.

Acknowledgement

Agricultural Research Council (ARC-Infruitec/Nietvoorbij) and members of Agri-Africa/Karwil Consultancy are here-with acknowledged for the information provided.

Reference

http://www.rooibos.ch/honeybush_info.html

DENENE ERASMUS. Honeybush tea: a taste of success. *Farmer's Weekly*, 6 April 2012.



Honeybush tea

Further information can be obtained from:

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Scientific name:	<i>Cyclopia</i> species
Common names:	Honeybush (English) Heuningbos (Afrikaans)
Family:	Fabaceae



agriculture

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Background

Honeybush tea is an indigenous herbal tea in South African (Cape fynbos biome) and grows in the coastal districts of the Western and Eastern Cape provinces. The distribution is from Darling to Port Elizabeth, bounded on the north and east by the Cederberg, Koue Bokkeveld, Klein Swartberg, Groot Swartberg and Kouga mountain ranges. Honeybush tea is found in very specific habitats such as on mountain slopes, marshy areas and coastal bands, depending on the species.

It has a pleasant, mildly sweet taste and aroma, somewhat like honey made from the shoots of the shrub. It contains no caffeine and has much lower tannin content than normal tea. There are about 24 species of honeybush tea found in the wild, of which mainly three are for commercial use.

The first commercial plantings took place towards the end of last century, and the area of land planted is now approximately 200 ha. Cultivation is very important from a nature conservation point of view. It is possible that wild populations of certain areas' honeybush species would be severely harmed or may even become extinct in certain areas owing to overexploitation, currently about 75% of honeybush is still harvested in the wild. It is therefore important to develop methods to cultivate honeybush sustainably for the commercial production of honeybush tea.

Climatic and soil requirements

Honeybush prefers to be planted in full sun and well-drained sandy to sandy loam-type soils, with a low pH (under five) and low phosphorus, free of nematodes. It prefers the cooler, wetter, misty conditions on the southern slopes of the mountains. The plant prefers average temperature variations between 12 to 29 °C.

Description

The plant

The plant can grow to about 1,5 metres tall.

Stem

The plant has a woody stems that can grow to about 1 m.

Leaves



The plant is easily recognised by its trifoliate leaves. Leaf shape and size differ within the species, but are mostly thin, needle-like to elongated, broadish leaves.

Flowers

It has single-flowered inflorescences and an

attractive yellow, heavily scented flower in the spring time (September/October).

Pods

The plant has small pods that turn brown. The pods dry and split open within a few weeks as the seed ripens. They ripen in late November or in December, depending on the microclimate.

Cultural practices

Soil preparation

The land should be cleared formerly, and then the soil should be worked to a depth of between 45 cm and 50 cm with a ripper. During soil preparation, phosphorus should be applied using rock phosphate at a rate of 500 kg/ha.

Planting

The best time for planting is after the first good winter rain and not later than the end of August. The seeds should be planted about 1 cm below the surface by hand.

Propagation

Honeybush can be propagated by seed or cuttings.

Fertilisation and irrigation

No fertiliser (except phosphates during soil preparation) or irrigation recommendations are available for honeybush cultivation.

Weed control

It is critically important to eradicate weeds before planting because once the honeybush has been planted; weeds can only be controlled by manual weeding. Before planting, a systemic, broad-spectrum, glyphosate herbicide, such as Roundup, should be sprayed to kill off as many weeds as possible. After planting, the weeds and other fynbos plants can be controlled by using a slasher.

Disease and pest control

The pests and diseases identified in honeybush include: money beetle and damping off. Money beetles are attracted by the sweet-smelling flowers at the tip of the branches. They are responsible for pollination. The brown seeds are formed in small pods that turn brown. The pods dry and split open within a few weeks as the seed ripens. To prevent damping off, a fungicide should be used. No chemical control should be used. Organic pest and insect control products are, however, limited and this may affect the decision to remain strictly organic.

Harvesting maturity

Traditionally, the natural tea is harvested during flowering, either in early autumn or late spring, depending on the flowering period of the species, but with the increasing demand, some of the major producers were forced to extend the harvesting period to late summer. The tea is harvested once

