

African Trees and Plants at Gardens of the World

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Etheringtons Gardens of the World, Clover Road, Hope, Nelson

Perhaps it is because I was raised in Kenya, perhaps it is because I was born at 8300 ft or 2500 m above sea level, that I am putting so much extra effort into the African Area of "Gardens of the World", a 6 acre (2½ ha), challenge for the rest of my life.

The climate at 2500 m on the equator is similar in many ways to the climate here in Nelson. The temperature range is roughly the same, and there are about the same amount of wet and dry times, with a similar rainfall.

The main difference is the length of days, which is constant at 12 h all the year round at the equator.

I have had no trouble growing trees which grow naturally at or above this altitude. Some of these are:

Hagenia abyssinica. A large, spreading, frost-hardy, evergreen tree which mulches itself with its own old leaves. It prefers a reasonably moist situation and is very fast growing with large compound leaves. My grandmother had one in her garden in Kenya. I can remember a Christmas when there were 80 of us sitting down to lunch at a long table, 40 people on each side, under this one tree. It was a truly magnificent, wonderful specimen. The dried female flower heads are used as a powerful remedy for intestinal worms, while an infusion of the bark will cure diarrhoea.

***Afrocarpus gracilior* (syn. *Podocarpus gracilior*)**. A graceful, slower growing evergreen tree with attractive pale green new growth and eventually good useful timber.

***Olea europaea* ssp. *africana* (syn. *O. africana*)**. (African olive). An evergreen tree with dark narrow leaves and a habit of growing in all directions. Eventually it produces dense wood which is useful for making ornamental furniture, and excellent for carving. I have made some very attractive table lamps. The bark, leaves, and roots are used in traditional medicine. The fruit is small and of no commercial value.

Juniperus procera. The East African cedar is a conifer which is used for timber, and is often grown in plantations as pines are here. It has very attractive red heartwood. I believe this is a tree which could have commercial value in New Zealand.

***Dombeya torrida* (syn. *D. goetzenii*)**. This is an evergreen forest tree which grows to 15 m usually in wet highland forests. The light brown wood was used in Kenya as a general purpose timber. It has large leaves and attractive umbels of white flowers with red centres. It is an attractive tree to have in a garden, as are the other shrub dombeyas which are grown here.

I am also growing some trees which are definitely marginal for our climate in Brightwater where we do get frosts. You will see quite a few trees with frost protection around them at Gardens of the World. I have even put a 25-watt electric bulb beneath some which I have on a thermostat, so that when the temperature

drops the small heat source improves the chances of the trees surviving while young. It would be better to grow them in frost-free areas.

Some examples are:

Vitex keniensis. A handsome deciduous forest tree which grows to 20 m with a clear straight trunk. It is similar to the puriri (*V. lucens*) though with a paler green leaf. It produces a valuable timber and has edible fruit. It is also valuable as an ornamental tree or can be used for windbreaks.

Polyscias fulva. The parasol tree, is a tall forest tree which grows to 25 m. Again it has a straight, slender trunk with a high crown which makes it look like an umbrella. It is a very decorative tree, fast growing, with very attractive large compound leaves.

***Allophylus cobbe* (syn. *A. abyssinicus*)**. This is another useful timber tree which grows in high mountain forests. It is an attractive, poplar-shaped tree with glossy leaves. As yet I have no more information on it, but I believe it will grow well here.

Croton megalocarpus. This is another forest tree which grows to 35 m. It spreads high above the forest canopy usually with a flattish crown and horizontal layers of branches. It is fast growing in good soils with conspicuous yellow flowers. The seeds and nuts contain oils and proteins and are eaten by birds. If you need a purgative take some of the oil.

I have all these trees available at the nursery as well as small quantities of other trees and shrubs both from East Africa and Southern Africa.

A few examples are :

Celtis africana. Stinkwood, so called as the wood smells when freshly cut. It is a deciduous, hardy tree.

Khaya nyasica. The African mahogany. A very attractive evergreen timber tree with brilliant red new growth.

Markhamia lutea. An upright evergreen flowering tree with bright yellow trumpet-shaped flowers and long thin seed pods which grow up to $\frac{3}{4}$ m, a most attractive ornamental tree for a frost free area.