

## Ancylobotrys capensis (Oliv.) Pichon

**Family:** Apocynaceae

**Common names:** rock milk apricot, wild apricot, dwarf wild apricot, wild peach ( Eng. ); klipmelkappelkoos, wilde-appelkoos, wilde-perske (Afr.); morobe (Northern Sotho); umdongwe (Zulu)



The fragrant, hardy, indigenous wild apricot, *Ancylobotrys capensis*, is a good substitute for the Chinese jasmine (*Jasminum polyanthum*) the scent of which fills the air around Pretoria in springtime. You may, as an added benefit, also be rewarded with a harvest of juicy fruit later in the season. Patient gardeners looking for a challenge or not knowing what to plant in difficult rocky patches in a highveld garden should try to establish *Ancylobotrys capensis* in their garden.

### Description

The rock milk apricot is an evergreen, multistemmed, densely branched, scrambling shrub, 1-2 m high, or it can become a lean, intertwining climber into other vegetation, then reaching heights of up to 5 m. The young branches and growth points are covered with soft, reddish brown hairs. The bark is reddish brown to greyish brown. All parts of the plant contain milky, rubbery latex.

The simple, opposite leaves are characteristically carried upright, they are oblong to broadly elliptic, 20-60 x 12-25 mm, dark green above, paler below and with herringbone veins pronounced on both sides. The leaves are leathery.



The flower tube and segments are pinkish to reddish orange to white on the outside and brilliant white on the inside. The flowers are large and up to 30 mm wide, borne in dense, showy clusters at the tips of branches, and are sweetly scented.



The fruit are rounded to pear-shaped, 35-50 mm in diameter. They are dark green to lime-green when young, turning yellow to orange as they mature. The skin is somewhat fleshy, velvety and tough, but peels away easily. Inside are numerous seeds, varying from round to almost bean-like and embedded in the sweet-sour pulp. The fruit resembles the apricot in colour but the taste is certainly different-the flesh is tasty and slightly sour, especially close to the seed.



### **Distribution and habitat**

*Ancylobotrys capensis* occurs naturally in northern KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, Limpopo Province, North-West Province and southeastern Botswana. The wild apricot is a characteristic species of dry bush in rocky situations and grows in grassland and bushveld, mainly on the scarp and summit of rocky outcrops or on plains with rocky ridges. It is widely distributed and found frequently. It is common on quartzite koppies mainly in the Rocky Highveld vegetation type in the northern provinces of South Africa.



### Derivation of name and historical aspects

The generic name *Ancylobotrys* is derived from two Greek words: *ancylo* (crooked, hooked or bent) and *botrys* (cluster or bunch), referring to the clusters of flowers carried on bent flower stalks at the tips of the stem. The Latin epithet *capensis* means from the Cape. This plant was previously known as *Landolphia capensis* and should not be mistaken for [Dovyalis zeyheri](#), which is also known as wild apricot. The genus *Ancylobotrys* is represented by five species in southern tropical Africa (Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique) and southern Africa. *Ancylobotrys* is closely related to *Landolphia*, the latter with 23 taxa in the same distribution area.

### Ecology

The starry white flowers appear mainly from August to September and then sporadically in early summer. The flowers last only for a couple of days. The fruit ripens from December to February. The climbing habit of the plants is made possible by the modified inflorescences (bent, hooked tips) that attach the plant to surrounding vegetation. The wild apricot is pollinated by bees and other insects searching for nectar and attracted by the perfume. Animals such as monkeys, baboons, dassies and birds (all very fond of the fruit) mainly disperse seed. The rock milk apricot is closely related to *Ancylobotrys petersiana* and *A. kirkii*, which also bear edible fruit and are important to local people.



### Uses and cultural aspects

Without flowers or fruit, this plant is not very attractive in its natural state. It does, however, have horticultural potential in large open gardens with rocky areas. If pruned back, especially in late summer, it can develop into an attractive bush—especially when in flower or when fruiting. In natural rocky areas with little soil it drapes itself over rocks and the gardener who imitates this situation will have a better display.

The fruit are edible, with a refreshing, tangy flavour and can be eaten either fresh or fried. Some say that it makes a good brandy, jelly or jam and even vinegar. The milky latex from members of this genus has been used as a source of good quality rubber. Some authors say the fruit are both edible and poisonous, probably referring to the milky latex in the skin that is typically poisonous in most members of the Apocynaceae.



### Growing *Ancylobotrys capensis*

Plants are easily grown from fresh, clean seed collected from January to February when the fruit are ripening. Make sure to clean the seeds and plant them directly into acidic leaf compost. They usually germinate quickly but can take as long as three months. Young plants can be transplanted into well-drained soil in a semi-shaded situation. The branches like sun but the roots have to be kept cool-in nature they are sheltered from the heat of the sun below rocks. Unfortunately, these plants are extremely slow growers, so if you decide to plant this species you have to be very patient.

This plant can be best used in rocky situations in a natural garden. It should be protected from frost in the cold months while young. An established plant is rather frost-tolerant and will easily resprout from the underground parts. It has a climbing habit, but in the absence of supporting vegetation it can become an untidy bush. It can generally be pruned or allowed to grow into the surrounding plants. When it does climb it is most decorative amongst other bushes and trees. No reports on pests attacking these plants have been published nor have any pests been observed by the author. This plant is available from only a few nurseries that specialize in indigenous plants.

### References and further reading

- Codd, L.E. 1963. Apocynaceae. *Flora of southern Africa* 26. Botanical Research Institute, Pretoria.
- Fabian, A. & Germishuizen, G. 1997. *Wild flowers of northern South Africa*. Fernwood Press, Vlaeberg, Cape Town.
- Leistner, O.A. (ed.). 2000. *Seed plants of southern Africa : families and genera*. Strelitzia 10. National Botanical Institute, Pretoria.
- Letty, C., Dyer, R.A., Verdoorn, I.C. & Codd, L.E. 1962. *Wildflowers of the Transvaal*. Wildflowers of the Transvaal Book Fund, Johannesburg.
- Pooley, E. 1998. *A field guide to wildflowers of KwaZulu-Natal and the eastern region*. Natal Flora Publications Trust, Durban.
- Schmidt, E., Lötter, M. & McClelland, W. 2002. *Trees and shrubs of Mpumalanga and Kruger National Park*. Jacana, Johannesburg.
- Smith, C.A. 1966. Common names of South African plants. *Memoirs of the Botanical Survey of South Africa* No. 35.
- Swart, W. 1982. Survival off the bush-5: the yummy num-nums. *Farmer's Weekly*, October 29: 58-59.

- Thomas, V., Grant, R. & Van Gogh, J. 1998. *Sappi tree spotting: Highveld and the Drakensberg*. Jacana, Johannesburg.
- Van Gogh, J. & Anderson J. 1988. *Bome en struik van die Witwatersrand, Magaliesberg en Pilansberg*. Struik, Cape Town.
- Van Wyk, A.E. & Malan, S. 1997. *Field guide to the flowers of the Witwatersrand and Pretoria area including Magaliesberg and Suikerbosrand*. Struik, Cape Town.
- Van Wyk, B-E. & Gericke, N. 2000. *People's plants : a guide to useful plants of southern Africa*. Briza Publications, Pretoria.
- Watt, J.M. & Brandwijk, M.G. 1962. *The medicinal and poisonous plants of southern and eastern Africa*. Livingstone, Edinburgh and London.

If you enjoyed this webpage, please  
record your vote.

- Excellent - I learnt a lot
- Good - I learnt something new

**Stoffel Petrus Bester**  
**National Herbarium**  
**October 2005**

Submit

To find out if SANBI has seed of this or other SA species, please email our [seedroom](#).

This page forms part of the South African National Biodiversity Institute's plant information website  
[www.plantzafrica.com](http://www.plantzafrica.com).



© S A National Biodiversity Institute



[Copyright/Using this information](#)