

Trees, glorious trees

From Saturday, 1 September 2012, to Friday, 7 September 2012, South Africa celebrates national Arbor Week. During this period, we are asked to plant trees and to consider the impact that we have on our environment. Trees are our life source and without them earth, as we know it, will not be able to survive. Now is the time for us to show that we care about the future of our planet.

This year's favourites

Every year at least two specific trees are highlighted during Arbor Week: a common tree and a rare species tree. This year the common tree is the waterberry or waterbessieboom (*Syzygium cordatum*) and the chosen rare trees are the red beech or rooiboekenhout (*Protorhus longifolia*) and the black mangrove or swartwortelboom (*Bruguiera gymnorhiza*).

The waterberry is a large and resilient tree which provides shelter and food for many species of birds, mammals and insects and is large enough to stabilise eroded river banks.

The red beech does well in gardens and it attracts birds to its fruit. It grows fairly quickly, tolerates slight frost and is drought-resistant. A perfect tree for our summers!

The black mangrove is threatened by over-exploitation and in South Africa it is protected in terms of the National Forestry Act, which means that a permit must be obtained before this tree, or parts of it, is collected. The tree needs full sun to partial shade, lots of water and a relatively warm environment. The black mangrove does well in warm, waterlogged soil.

Take part in Arbor Week

There are many ways to take part in Arbor Week even if you do not have a garden. Visit www.greenpop.org and click on the 'Give trees' tab. There you will find four exciting ways in which you can take part in this initiative:

1. Give a tree as a gift: Buy a tree for a school or for one of Greenpop's reforestation projects.
2. Plant a tree as a group: This is a great team-building opportunity.
3. Give a tree as a gift every month: You can plant trees every month and start your own forest by pledging your willingness with Greenpop.
4. Order tree rings: Tree rings represent the real trees that will be planted on behalf of the person receiving them. This is a great gift idea!

Why should you plant a tree?

- Trees provide food and shelter for wildlife and humans.
- Trees prevent soil erosion.
- Trees absorb toxic carbon dioxide and supply us with oxygen.
- Trees are a source of food, medicine and timber.
- Trees' fallen leaves create nutrient-rich soil.
- Trees protect us from severe weather.

Please contact us if you wish to share your green living story. E-mail us at Better.Together@westerncape.gov.za