Buffalo thorn (Common name: English). The many disadvantaged communities who often live in barren and water and maintain indigenous trees throughout South Africa, especially for fruit trees in your food garden can address household food security. We need to plant a tree with every new home. We need to ensure that every year the department would like to ask you to:

- Follow the theme because South Africa has not escaped the effects of drought. This year the department would like to ask you to:
- Nomination forms with guidelines for the nomination process have been distributed to departments, municipalities, conservation authorities and groups of trees have been declared by the department as Champion trees.

For 2017 the following two tree species have been selected as trees of the year.

- Ziziphus mucronata: Buffalo thorn (Common name: English). This tree has been selected from the list of common species.
- Euclrea pseudebenus: Black Ebony (Common name: English). This tree has been selected from the list of rare species.

In addition to the planting of trees, emphasis is made to highlight the need for saving water and in particular indigenous trees that are threatened by extinction. To this end, the Arbor Week campaign will promote planting of two indigenous species that have been identified and named as trees of the year.

These trees are selected from commonly found trees and the rare tree species.

Champion Trees Project

The purpose of the Champion Tree Project is to identify and protect trees that are of national importance and worthy of special protection. It is estimated that 600 species of trees and in particular indigenous trees that are threatened by extinction. To this end, the Arbor Week campaign will promote planting of two indigenous species that have been identified and named as trees of the year.

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Three trees are all protected under the National Forests Act of 1998.

- They include the Tsiselkamma Big Tree along the Garden Route, the Post Office Tree of Mossel Bay, the Sibole Babool tree in Limpopo and Camphor trees planted at Vergellegene Estate in the Western Cape, three centuries ago.

The oldest planted tree in South Africa is a Saffron pear, brought from the Netherlands and planted in the Dutch Colony. The Sibole Babool is named as the Cape Town more than three centuries ago.

Historically, South Africa did not have a culture of tree planting and it was in the 1970's that a real need to promote tree planting was recognised. The concept of National Arbor Day ensued from the 1973 Green Heritage Campaign.

Following requests from various organisations and Institutions, the former Department of Forestry obtained approval in 1982 to celebrate National Arbor Day from 1983. In 1996, the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, emphasising the importance of tree planting in South Africa extended Arbor Day from one day to two days and it has since been celebrated in South Africa from 1-7 September annually.

Arbor Week is a national campaign initiated to celebrate South Africa’s trees and to raise awareness about their importance. The theme for Arbor Week last year was “Forests and Water: The Theme is retained from last year because South Africa has not escaped the effects of drought. This year the department would like to ask you to:

- Protect our indigenous forests; help prevent veld and forest fires; plant a tree to green our country, mitigate against climate change, plant indigenous trees that save water; use water conserving methods when planting trees and integrate fruit trees into your food gardens.

How can you help to protect our indigenous forests?

Our forests are under threat from people who are careless with our heritage. Never cut down a tree in a natural forest and do not remove an animal or living plant without permission. Explain to others the importance of protecting our natural places.

How can you help to prevent forest fires?

Each year veld and forest fires destroy thousands of hectares of trees and grasslands. Many people are injured and even killed. Animals are endangered and livelihoods are destroyed. These fires also damage our economy by destroying valuable assets.

Do not light fires in the open air during winter time when it is dry. Do not be careless with flammable material. Report fires to your fire brigade or local authorities as soon as possible. Never drive or walk into an area that is on fire. If you are a landowner, it is recommended that you become a member of the local Fire Protection Association. Ask your local forestry office for details.

What about planting a tree?

Many places in South Africa are barren and lifeless because they do not have forests. In the past, trees were not planted in township areas while suburbs have usually had trees growing for many years. We have to plant trees in every town, city and school in South Africa.

We need to plant a tree with every new home. We need to ensure that every clinic has trees. You can help by planting trees at home or working with your school, church, or local government to plant trees. Integrating fruit trees in your food garden can address household food security. Remember we are a water-scarce country, so use methods that conserve water to irrigate your trees.

Forests filter and purify water. The leaves and root systems of trees can trap or convert harmful toxins, helping to prevent impurities from entering water systems, reduce atmospheric pollution and urbanisation.

Fires are set in many instances in which land is locked up by many years. To put this into perspective; one hectare of forest growing at the rate of 0.3% a year can produce enough oxygen to sustain the equivalent of 14 million m3 of air. One can visualise this as a column of air 1.4 km deep over an area of forest the size of two soccer fields.

Do keep in mind that trees do not all grow equally fast, and all forests are not equally productive as carbon sinks. Trees in urban environments and commercial forestry plantations are generally quite fast growing and are therefore active carbon sinks. Under favourable conditions and good management these can achieve an annual growth rate of 20% per hectare.

Forests and the Economy

According to Forestry South Africa, forestry is estimated to contribute about 146 000 jobs, predominantly in rural areas where there are high levels of unemployment. About 40% of this is comprised of 52% of jobs in the sector due to factors of production affecting profitability throughout the world. The value of the South African forestry sector is estimated at R45 billion. This translates to 7.7% of manufacturing GDP and 25.5% of Agricultural GDP, including pulp and paper. It is through commercial plantations and indigenous forests that the South African economy, forest products, paper production and other beneficial timber related enterprises.

THEMES: FORESTS AND WATER

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**Ziziphus mucronata**

**DESCRIPTION**
- **ORIGIN:** Grows throughout the summer rainfall areas of sub-saharan Africa, extending from South Africa to Ethiopia and Arabia; in a wide range of habitats such as woodlands, scrubland, rocky kopjes, open grasslands, and dunescapes, in valley bottoms and forest margins.
- **ECOLOGY:** It is regarded as an indicator of ground water. The leaves and fruits of this tree are sought after by birds, wild animals and domestic stock.
- **FLOWERS, FRUIT AND LEAVES:** Giraffes are known to be especially fond of the leaves of this tree whilst impalas often feed on the dead leaves lying under the tree. It’s flowers produce abundant nectar and often yield good honey.
- **USES:** Z. mucronate has many uses which include its edible fruits which are used to make porridge, beer and juice; used to make tincture, whilst seeds can be used as a coffee substitute. The tree is also used in traditional medicine to treat ailments such as stomach aches, skin ulcers, and chest problems. A paste of the leaves can also be used to treat boils and glandular swelling. The fruits have blackened and fallen to the ground, attracting birds and insects such as butterflies, beetles and bees. It is regarded as an indicator of ground water.
- **APPEARANCE:** Has a spreading canopy and the main stem is green and hairy when young.
- **MAINTENANCE:** Low maintenance.

**Euclea pseudebenus**

**DESCRIPTION**
- **ORIGIN:** Widespread in the western parts of South Africa, extending to the southwestern, central and northern parts of Namibia and southern Angola. Mainly found in harsh, stony and sand deserts and semi-deserts areas, in dry rivers, on plains and floodplains or around pans.
- **ECOLOGY:** This tree is pollinated by insects and seeds are dispersed by birds and mammals. Its dropping form and structure creates good shelter for insects, birds and small mammals, particularly in summer.
- **FLOWERS, FRUIT AND LEAVES:** The flowers of this tree are small, bell-shaped and hardly noticeable but with a distinct fragrance. They are greenish yellow or cream coloured. Fruit is round, reddish brown glossy drupe with a dry pulp and often remain on the tree after the leaves have fallen.
- **USES:** The ebony tree produces edible fruits that are sweet and slightly astringent. In tradition medicine, the roots of the tree are used for ailments such as headaches and toothache.
- **APPEARANCE:** Has a spreading canopy and the main stem is green and hairy when young.
- **MAINTENANCE:** Low maintenance.

**FACTS AT A GLANCE**

**Ziziphus mucronata**
- **SCIENTIFIC NAME:** Ziziphus mucronata
- **COMMON NAME:** Buffalo thorn
- **SIZE:** Small to medium tree of 3 - 10 m
- **WATER REQUIREMENTS:** Drought tolerant
- **LEAVES/FLOWERS:** Glossy green, simple, alternate leaves that are bluish green to grey green; flowers are greenish yellow or cream coloured.
- **FEATURE:** Slender drooping branches.
- **MAINTENANCE:** Low maintenance.

**Euclea pseudebenus**
- **SCIENTIFIC NAME:** Euclea pseudebenus
- **COMMON NAME:** Ebony tree / Wild ebony
- **SIZE:** Shrub/medium to large tree of 3-10m
- **WATER REQUIREMENTS:** Drought tolerant
- **LEAVES/FLOWERS:** Evergreen, spirally arranged leaves that are bluish green to grey green; flowers are bell-shaped greenish yellow or cream coloured.
- **FEATURE:** Slender drooping branches, often hang down the length of the tree.
- **MAINTENANCE:** Low maintenance.

**REFERENCES:**