

AN INDIGENOUS GARDEN IN KHAYELITSHA

by *Landy Wright, Abalimi Bezekhaya*

Abalimi Bezekhaya is a food gardening and greening, non-government organization that has been working in the Cape Flats since 1986. Initially the organizations' focus was on vegetable growing but in 1994, Abalimi launched its greening programme known as the Cape Flats Tree Project. What started as an annual distribution of trees during Arbor Week has become an extended greening programme and central to this programme is the development of school gardens.

In 1997 the Botanical Society assisted Abalimi in raising funds to establish an indigenous garden at Intshayeleso School in Khayelitsha. (See *Veld & Flora* 83 December 1997). With the co-operation of the Intshayeleso teachers and pupils, we planted a number of Proteaceae and fynbos species at the school. We have found that *Chondropetalum tectorum* does very well, *Protea obtusifolia* is slow but it grows, *Leucadendron linifolium* does very well and *L. coniferum* is a bit slower but nonetheless copes with the alkaline soil and windy conditions. Top of the list however, is *Leucadendron meridianum*.

The female of the *Leucadendron meridianum* species does so well that we thought it might be a hybrid that has been mixed in with the original batch. Thanks to John Rourke of the Compton Herbarium, we were able to sort out the confusion in seconds. He also corrected the naming of *Leucadendron linifolium* (I had wrongly labelled it. *L. teretifolium*) and then gave me the following fascinating information. According to Dr Rourke the seeds of *Leucadendron meridianum* are ideal for feeding chickens. All you have to do is remove the mature cones, store them in a dry place and within three weeks they will open and release hundreds of rich, succulent seed. If you want to spread the seed for propagation pick the mature cones in February, keep them in a shoe box and scatter them when the first rains start.

Intshayeleso School's garden is becoming a mature garden. Of all the *Rhus* species, *Rhus crenata* has proved the most successful. This species, along with *Brachylaena discolor*, *Salvia africana-lutea* (formerly *S. aurea*) and *Eriocephalus africanus*, forms the backbone of the garden. We have been a bit disappointed with the buchu which, with



Ten year old Siyasanga, who is grade 4, is proud of her school's garden, and intrigued to hear that the seeds of *Leucadendron meridianum* can be used to feed chickens.
Photo: L. Wright.

one remaining *Serruria aemula*, struggle on.

Six species - three introduced and three local - have spread themselves through the garden. The most successful self-propagator is *Syncarpha argyropsis* (witsewajaartjie). It is a highly rewarding plant and in spring it creates a blanket of white flowers on a bed of silver leaves. *Felicia echinata* too spreads easily and makes a pleasing combination with *Leucadendron meridianum*. *Polygala myritifolia* (September bush) struggles to survive when it is planted from bags but once established it seeds very easily.

Of the plants that occur naturally in Khayelitsha, *Metalasia muricata* (blombos), *Otholobium* and *Chrysanthemoides monilifera* (bitou) have found their own way into the gardens.

Abalimi is grateful to the Botanical Society for providing us with the opportunity to experiment with our indigenous Cape flora. Intshayeleso School has become a model indigenous garden. Teachers, pupils and visitors pause to read the plant labels and are both informed and inspired to re-create the garden in their own homes. Abalimi would like to thank the many individuals who responded to the BotSoc appeal for their contribution to our work. For us, the success of the leucadendrons has strengthened the connection between the Cape Flats and the broader conservation movement. As the gardens mature we will continue to experiment with and monitor new varieties.

Next autumn we want to try *Protea scolymocephala* again and we will definitely be sowing home grown *Leucadendron meridianum* seed. ♡

Anyone who is interested in visiting us or wishes to contribute to our projects - in any way - is welcome to contact the Abalimi Bezekhaya administrative office at tel (021) 447 1256, e-mail abalimi@iafrica.com.

Intshayeleso School Grade 7 teacher, Mr Guzana, uses flowers from this *Eriocephalus* bush to illustrate his lesson.
Photo: L. Wright.

