

A selection of species in the genus *Asclepias*. For more info see <http://pza.sanbi.org/asclepias-genus>



Asclepias adscendens (Photo SP Bester)

***Asclepias adscendens* (Schltr.) Schltr.**

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial herb, 100–200 mm tall. Leaves linear-lanceolate to ovate; umbels solitary and terminal with 12–15 flowers. Peduncles 5–65 mm long. Corolla lobes reflexed or spreading reflexed with upcurved tips. Flowers white to pinkish or purplish. Plants flower in spring to early summer (August to December); in grassland.

Widely distributed in Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa (Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West Provinces); also Eswatini and Zimbabwe.



Asclepias albens (Photo SP Bester)

***Asclepias albens* (E.Mey.)Schltr.**

Common names: cartwheels (Eng.); tshalale (TshiVenda).

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial erect or decumbent herb, 250–500 mm tall, unbranched or branched at the base. Leaves ovate to ovate-lanceolate, base subcordate to broadly rounded, bristly hairy on both sides. Umbels solitary, terminal, robust (up to 80 mm in diam.) with 15–30 flowers. Peduncles 40–100 mm long. Corolla lobes reflexed, glabrous inside. Flowers white or light purple or pinkish. Plants flower in midsummer (December to January) and grow in grassland.

The young leaves are eaten as a spinach.

Widely distributed in the eastern part of southern Africa in Lesotho, South Africa (Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West Provinces); also Eswatini.



Asclepias aurea (Photo SP Bester)

***Asclepias aurea* (Schltr.) Schltr.**

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial herb, 140–500 mm tall. Leaves long and linear, glabrous; umbels axillary and terminal, usually with 4 (rarely 5–8) flowers. Relatively long scapose peduncles 40–140 mm long. Corolla lobes reflexed or spreading, canescent inside. Flowers yellow or white; corona white, yellow or purple with white sides; flowers in spring to autumn (August to May).

Grows on grassy slopes or rocky hillsides.

Used medicinally as an emetic.

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Asclepias brevipes (Photo S. Slabber)

***Asclepias brevipes* (Schltr.) Schltr.**

Common name: bokhorinkie (Afr.).

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial decumbent herb; leaves linear, scabrous. Umbels terminal and axillary, usually with 4 flowers; peduncle 10–50 mm long; corolla lobes spreading, canescent inside, pubescent outside. Flowers yellow-brown tinted white or green; corona reddish brown, purple or white; flowers in spring to early summer (September to December).

Usually found in burnt veld on hillsides. Restricted to the northern parts of South Africa (Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West Provinces).



Asclepias crispa (Photo C. McMaster)

***Asclepias crispa* P.J.Bergius var. *crispa*.**

Common name: bitterwortel (Afr.).

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial herb 150–400 mm tall; leaves crisped-wavy, linear to lanceolate, truncate, rounded or cuneate at base; scabrous or pubescent. Umbels solitary, terminal or 2–4 racemously arranged, pedunculated, with 7–40 flowers; corolla lobes reflexed, glabrous on both sides or pubescent outside. Flowers dull green or purplish tinted inside, brown purplish outside; corona greenish or with purple outer margin. Usually flowers in spring (September).

Decoctions or infusions of the root are used as a diuretic and purgative medicine. Reported to be toxic to livestock.



Asclepias cucullata (Photo SP Bester)

***Asclepias cucullata* (Schltr.) Schltr. subsp. *cucullata*.**

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial herb, erect to decumbent. Leaves linear to narrowly lanceolate; corolla lobes spreading with tips curving up; scabrous to pubescent outside, canescent inside. Corona lobes erect, shorter than or only slightly exceeding the staminal column, cucullate part of corona lobes ± as long as broad. Flowers purple or mauve, white to grey. Plants usually flower in spring to early summer (September to December).

Grows in open mountain grassland. Mainly along the southern Cape coast but also other parts of South Africa (, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Eastern and Western Cape Provinces); also Eswatini.

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Asclepias cultriformis (Photo J. Kinkel)

***Asclepias cultriformis* (Harv. ex Schltr.) Schltr.**

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial herb 150–300 mm tall. Leaves oblong, lanceolate or ovate-lanceolate. Corolla lobes ascending-spreading, pubescent outside, pubescent to densely white-hairy at tips and along margins, glabrous inside. Corona lobes with compressed, erect processes or horn within cavity. Flowers green or dark purple-brown; corona white with violet spot on back near apex and violet at base. Plants flower December to February.

Grows in grassland.

Distributed in Lesotho, South Africa (Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces); also Eswatini.



Asclepias eminens (Photo SP Bester)

***Asclepias eminens* (Harv.) Schltr.**

Common names: montsoko, montsokoane (SSotho).

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial, decumbent herb; leaves lanceolate leaves, leaf base hastate or auriculate. Umbels solitary, terminal with 6 or 7 flowers. Corolla lobes reflexed, glabrous outside, canescent to puberulent inside. Corona lobes 6 or 7 times as long as broad (viewed from the side), overtopping the staminal column by half their length. Flowers green, greenish pink or greenish white to white; flowers mainly in summer, October to April.

Plants inhabit open grassland, rocky hillsides or moist parts of wetlands or cultivated lands.

Leaves, stems, flowers are eaten, usually raw, seldom cooked, and the crushed dried root is added to milk as a flavouring.

Widespread in the eastern parts of southern Africa in Lesotho, South Africa (Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West Provinces); also Eswatini and Zimbabwe.

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Asclepias fallax (Photo SP Bester)

***Asclepias fallax* (Schltr.) Schltr.**

Common names: umdayi, umdzayi, (Eswati); xihaja (Shangaan); umdoyi (isiZulu).

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial herb 150–300 mm tall. Leaves lanceolate with truncate to cuneate-hastate base. Umbels solitary and terminal or 2, the lower lateral, with 12–15 flowers in a compact head. Peduncles 50–120 mm long. Corolla lobes reflexed with upcurved tips, glabrous. Flowers white tinted with purple-maroon on the back. Corona greenish yellow, dark violet-brown on the back and base. Flowers in midsummer (December to January).

Cooked leaves are eaten as a relish with other foods.

Plants grow in grassland. Occurs in South Africa (Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West Provinces); also Eswatini.



Asclepias fulva (Photo A. Shuttleworth)

***Asclepias fulva* N.E.Br.**

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial herb 80–380 mm tall. Leaves linear-oblong, lanceolate to ovate-oblong, broadest at the base. Umbels 2–6, lateral and terminal with 5–10 flowers. Peduncles 10–70 mm long. Pubescence on umbels very short, often rust-coloured or tawny. Corolla lobes rotately spreading or somewhat reflexed, glabrous inside. Flowers green, flowering mainly from early summer to autumn (November to May).

Plants grow in grassland. Widely distributed throughout Africa in Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa (Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West Provinces); also Eswatini, Tanzania, Uganda Zambia and Zimbabwe.



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Asclepias gibba var. *gibba* (Photo SP Bester)

***Asclepias gibba* (E.Mey.) Schltr. var. *gibba*.**

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial herb, 10–300 mm tall. Leaves linear, base auriculate or hastate. Umbels solitary, terminal, with 4–10 flowers. Corolla lobes spreading to reflexed, glabrous outside, canescent inside. Corona lobes distinctly gibbous or curved on the back with an erect-subulate point at their dorsal apex. Flowers grey-mauve, green-mauve, silver-grey or greenish white, tinted purple. Usually flowers from spring to late summer (October to February).

Grows in grassland in Lesotho, South Africa (Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West Provinces); also Eswatini.



Asclepias macropus (Photo A. Shuttleworth)

***Asclepias macropus* (Schltr.) Schltr.**

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Decumbent perennial herb with ovate, ovate-oblong leaves that are rounded or cordate at the base, scabrid or subhispid. Umbels solitary, terminal, with 12–30 flowers; peduncles 80–150 mm long. Corolla lobes reflexed with upcurved tips, glabrous. Corona lobes 4–5 mm long. Flowers yellowish green with back and basal part brownish purple. Plants usually flower in midsummer (January)

Grows in grassland. Distributed in Lesotho and South Africa (Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces).



Asclepias fallax (Photo SP Bester)

***Asclepias meliodora* (Schltr.) Schltr.**

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial herb 50–130 mm tall with leaves lanceolate. Leaf base subtruncate, subcordate or subhastate, pubescent. Umbels 2 or 3, subcorymbose at the end of stems between 2 leaves, with 7–15 flowers. Peduncles much shorter than leaves at their base. Corolla lobes reflexed, glabrous. Corona lobes 3–4 mm long. Flowers whitish, dull purple-tinted on the back. Plants flower from spring to late summer (September to March).

Grows on mountain sides and plains. Distributed in Botswana, South Africa (Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West Provinces); also Eswatini and Mozambique.

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Asclepias multicaulis (Photo A. Shuttleworth)

***Asclepias multicaulis* (E.Mey.) Schltr.**

Common names: melkbossie (Afr.); lenkileng (Sotho).

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial herb 100–150 mm tall. Leaves shortly triangular, base truncate, subsaggitate or subhastate, glabrous above. Umbels solitary, rarely 2 per stem, terminal, with 6–9 flowers. Corolla lobes reflexed, glabrous outside, minutely papillose inside. Flowers grey-pink or mauve or darker maroon outside and cream-coloured inside. Corona yellow. Plants flower in spring and early summer (Oct. to Dec.). Leaves, stems, flowers and pods are eaten raw or cooked.

Grows in grassland in Lesotho and South Africa (Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces).



Asclepias stellifera (Photo SP Bester)

***Asclepias stellifera* Schltr.**

Common names: melkbos (Afr.).

Conservation status: Least Concern (LC).

Perennial herb 120–290 mm tall. Leaves linear, scaberulous. Umbels numerous, 4-flowered. Corolla lobes reflexed, pubescent outside, canescent inside. Corolla and corona lobes 5–6 mm long. Flowers yellow-red, mauve to pink or dirty pink, or pale yellowish cream-coloured. Plants flower from midwinter to midsummer (July to January) and grows in grassland.

The latex has been used as arrow poison because of the cardiac glycosides that it contains; also used for stomach ailments and protruding fontanelles, as a snake-bite remedy and African charm when a person has been struck by lightning. It is a good source of rubber but has not been exploited for this.

Distributed in Lesotho, South Africa (Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces); also Eswatini.

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Reference: Retief, E. & Herman, P.P.J. 1997. Plants of the northern provinces of South Africa: keys and diagnostic characters. *Strelitzia* 6. National Botanical Institute, Pretoria.