

HONEYBUSH

(*Cyclopia* species)

Honeybush is the common name of 23 members of the genus *Cyclopia*. It is an endemic fynbos shrub growing only on the sandy coastal plains, mountain slopes and valley bottoms of the Cape Fold mountains across the Western and Eastern Cape provinces of South Africa.

Six of the 23 *Cyclopia* species are harvested in the wild or cultivated to produce Honeybush tea and extracts. The plant material is finely chopped and placed in fermentation tanks for oxidation at high temperatures, allowing the development of its unique flavour and rich reddish brown colour. The tea is dried, sieved, graded for quality and packaged. Production of green Honeybush skips the fermentation and oxidation to retain high levels of anti-oxidants, making it suitable for nutraceutical extracts.

The industry has grown from one based on a wild resource providing 85% of harvested material in 2011 to one that now relies on cultivation. In 2023, 53% of raw Honeybush came from roughly 330 hectares of cultivated land managed by small community enterprises and larger private enterprises.

Honeybush is mainly an export product, with 75% of the tea produced being sold to Europe, Japan and the USA. Although average annual export volume is only around 300 tonnes, it is a locally important industry for many farmers and a livelihood for traditional harvesters.



ABioSA/Brett Eloff

Honeybush makes a naturally sweet herbal tea. Low in tannins and caffeine-free, it boasts high levels of antioxidants, with a long history of therapeutic use. Suitable for nursing mothers and babies, it is a soothing herbal infusion which eases digestive discomfort. It can be applied topically for irritated skin or used to treat coughs. It boosts the immune system, eases constipation and is a rich source of minerals.

Research shows that Honeybush may provide alternative treatment for several conditions; it has anti-inflammatory effects, antioxidant properties, and anti-cancer potential, as well as a positive effect on Type 2 diabetes sufferers.

With further research and development, Honeybush has significant potential to be marketed as a niche indigenous product in speciality tea markets internationally.

Please come and hear Honeybush sector experts talking about business and community inclusion in the sector

African Biotrade Festival conference hall
12h15 on Friday, 15 September



Conservation and sustainable use

Growing demand creates opportunities for increased production and jobs, but also puts pressure on wild Honeybush populations. The shift to sustainable cultivation and less reliance on wild harvesting is an important development in the growth of the industry.

Through involvement of emerging farmers, particularly those recognised as traditional knowledge holders, adoption of biodiversity-friendly farming practices and sustainable harvesting of the wild resource, the industry is well placed to meet national and international biotrade standards.

The South African Honeybush Tea Association (SAHTA)

SAHTA is the representative industry organisation that coordinates activities in the sector. Its aim is to help more farmers to grow and market Honeybush, and ensure sustainable farming and wild harvesting.

SAHTA is implementing a Sector Development Plan that includes the following activities:

- Support and promote a stable, inclusive and resilient Honeybush industry
- Represent the industry on a regulatory level
- Negotiate with traditional knowledge holders and conclude an industry-wide Benefit-Sharing Agreement
- Grow the industry by creating market demand
- Develop and implement generic marketing for the sector
- Support research and development
- Coordinate the collection and administration of a Traditional Knowledge Levy
- Ensure sustainable supply of Honeybush through improved wild harvesting practices
- Develop guidelines for a Biodiversity Management Plan industry task team
- Collect and maintain industry statistics
- Support new businesses entering the Honeybush industry



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