

10 South African Plants (to get to know!)

Brett Hall, Director, Native Plant Program, Jan. 2012

1. Common name: **horsetail restio, fonteinriet**
Scientific name: *Elegia capensis*
Family: **Restionaceae**

Description: *Elegia capensis* is a lovely clumping Restio with clustered culms emerging from rhizomes and growing into large (10 by 12 ft) bamboo-like green fountains. Each internode has a circle of needle-like branches, resembling horsetails (*Equisetum*). These are surrounded by large papery textured sheaths which shed as they mature. Like all restios, *Elegia capensis* is dioecious (separate male and female plants). The inflorescences are a very showy golden brown and a little over a foot long. The plants form a “thick forest of stems” and can easily occupy large spaces. In cultivation, the more water, the more lush and vibrant it will be!



2. Common name: **channeled heath**
Scientific name: *Erica canaliculata*
Family: **Ericaceae** (Heath Family)

Description: *Erica canaliculata* is a dense large evergreen shrub up to 8 ft high and 8 ft wide. It flowers profusely in fall and winter with tiny, beautiful pink urn-shaped flowers along the lateral branchlets. It can be distinguished from other ericas by its very long styles protruding from the corollas. It is a long-lived shrub, tolerant of a wide range of soil conditions, and has survived all the significant freezes here in the Arboretum since 1979. There are several color forms and a few cultivars in the trade.



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3. Common cultivars include 'Winter Red'

Scientific name: *Leucadendron salignum*

Family: **Proteaceae**

Description: *Leucadendron salignum* is a multi-stemmed shrub with a persistent rootstock so it recovers after fire and is easily rejuvenated in cultivation through pruning. It is a very popular cut flower and foliage shrub with many selections, cultivars and hybrids. It grows rapidly in a wide range of conditions and soil types and is pretty free of diseases.



4. Common Name: **Sugar Bush, Suikerbos**

Scientific Name: *Protea repens*

Family: **Proteaceae (Protea Family)**

Description: *Protea repens* is one of the easiest, most adaptable and reliable proteas in cultivation. It is tolerant of a wide range of soils, from heavy clay to deep sand, and is somewhat tolerant of summer irrigation. Like all other proteas, its most harmful diseases are fungal, especially phytophthora (Cinnamon Fungus). Flower color ranges from bright red to yellow and cream.



5. Common name: **Cape thatching reed, dakriet**

Scientific name: *Elegia tectorum* (*syn.*

Chondropetalum)

Family: **Restionaceae**

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Description: Cape thatching reed is a very popular Restio in the landscape and gardening trade in California. It is a wonderful plant along a path, in a grouping, or in a large container. Though it is native near waterways it does surprisingly well with little water in summer here along the central coast. It is deep green with reed like stems and male or female inflorescence stalks. Plants are dioecious. It is also useful as a cut green in bouquets. Best grown from seed, which benefit from smoke treatment.



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6. Common name: **Silver tree, witteboom**
Scientific name: *Leucadendron argenteum*,
Family: **Proteaceae**

Description: *Leucadendron argenteum* is a very rare and endangered species in the wild, and one of the most beloved of South African trees. Its silky, silvery leaves shimmer intensely in the light. It is an erect growing small tree to 30 ft and is very fickle in cultivation. In our experience, 50% of the individuals we plant usually die without warning within the first five to ten years. Like most members of the Proteaceae, silver tree is highly susceptible to cinnamon fungus and other root rotting diseases. Summer irrigation, especially during hot weather, or long periods of saturation in the winter can lead to its demise. Silver trees are dioecious (separate male and female plants) like all leucadendrons.



7. Common name: **Giant honey flower, Kruidjie-roer-my-nie**
Scientific name: *Melianthus major*
Family: **Melianthaceae**

Description: *Melianthus major* is a winter-growing herbaceous perennial that suckers and spreads as it goes. It has huge pinnate compound leaves that are grey green and smell like peanut butter to some and vitamin B to others. The large bronze or rusty red flowering spikes are full of nectar, bird pollinated, and emerge high above the leaves. It grows best with good drainage and full sun, and it is fast!



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8. Common name: **sapree wood, Mlanji Cedar, African cypress**

Scientific name: *Widdringtonia cupressoides* (syn. *W. nodiflora*)

Family: **Cupressaceae**

Description: Evergreen monoecious conifer (flowers of separate sexes on same plant) to over 100 ft (seldom) with an open, conical crown. Juvenile foliage can be a lovely bluish green in color. These trees are very drought tolerant. They are a fire climax species, generally germinating seeds only after fire, like our California closed coned conifers.



9. Common name: **oleanderleaf protea, baardsuikerbos,**

Scientific name: *Protea neriifolia*

Family: **Proteaceae (Protea Family)**

Description: *Protea neriifolia* is a large, long flowering shrub with wonderful variation in timing of flower, color, degree and color of “beard”. It is relatively easy to cultivate with a wider tolerance to soil and wetness than other protea species, and is used extensively in the cut flower industry. Like other proteas it is a rich source of nectar for birds and other wildlife. This species has many cultivars.



10. Common name: **pincushion, bobbejaanklou, luisiesboom, luisiesbos**

Scientific name: *Leucospermum cordifolium*

Family: **Proteaceae**

Description: A beautiful rounded, spreading shrub, to 6 ft high by 10 ft wide. It forms striking sea urchin-like inflorescences in explosive color and mass profusion. Specimens, cultivars and hybrids range in color from orange to brilliant red to scarlet. There are many *Leucospermum* species in the garden that are in full flower during the mid-Spring.

