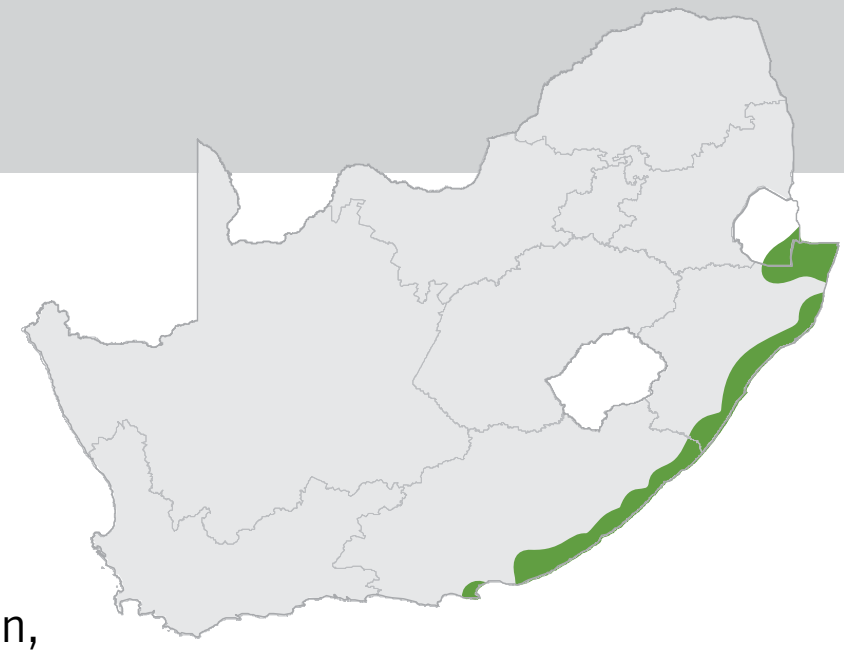
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South African National Biodiversity Institute

2025 TREES OF THE YEAR

Mimusops afra E.Mey. ex A.DC.



Family: Sapotaceae
National tree number: 583
Common names: coastal red-milkwood (English); *kusrooimelkhout* (Afrikaans); *umtunzi* (isiXhosa); *umkhakhayi* (isiZulu)

Medium-sized shrub or tree to 15 m high. Bark thin, rough, dark grey to brown, longitudinally grooved. Branches often short and twisted; young stems and leafstalks densely covered with long, velvety, rusty brown hairs. Leaves alternately arranged, leathery, dark green and hairless above, pale green and hairy below. Flowers in clusters, small, star-shaped, white to cream maturing to reddish brown. Flowering time: September to March. Fruits oval, fleshy, green maturing to orange-red; appearing from April to September. Seeds 1–2.



Requires lots of water
Requires full sun
Semi shade
Frost-resistant
Medicinal use
Edible
Useful wood
Protected

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Family: Sapotaceae
Common names: coastal red-milkwood (English); *kusrooimelkhout* (Afrikaans); *umtunzi* (isiXhosa); *umkhakhayi* (isiZulu)

General appearance

Mimusops afra is a medium-sized shrub or tree up to 15 m high. Trunk is often short, twisted and low-branching; young stems and leafstalks densely covered with long, velvety, rusty brown hairs. Bark rough, dark grey to brown, thin, longitudinally grooved. Leaves alternately arranged, leathery, dark green and hairless above, pale green and hairy below. Flowers clustered, star-shaped, white to cream. Flowering time: September to December. Fruit large orange berries, ripening to red, appearing from April to September. Seed 10–15 mm long with small basal scar.

Distribution and habitat

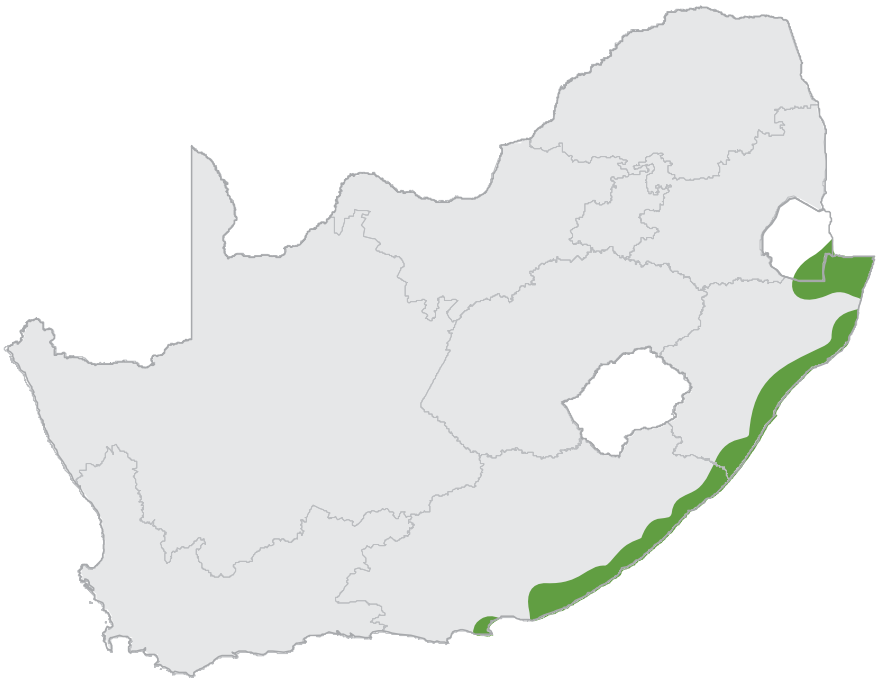
Trees grow in coastal habitats, confined dunes or sand forests, where they are often the dominant species. In South Africa it occurs in the Eastern Cape and extends further north through KwaZulu-Natal into Mozambique. It thrives in its preferred habitat and forms an important part of dune vegetation along the coastline from Port Alfred into KwaZulu-Natal.

Meaning of name

The genus name is from the Greek words *mimo* meaning 'ape' and *ops* meaning 'resembling'. The isiXhosa name *umtunzi* (also alternatively known as *umthunzi* in isiZulu), meaning 'shade tree' was given to a shady tree of this species near Umlalazi Lagoon where John Dunn held court. The village there is now known as Mtunzini in reference to the tree.

Ecology and uses

- Wood is durable and used for boats and good firewood.
- Root extracts are used in the treatment of sexually transmitted infections such as gonorrhoea; leaf extracts contain ursolic acid, which has anti-plasmodial activity and used to manage malaria; bark infusions are used as emetics and bark extracts are used to treat wounds and sores.



- Flowers attract bees, butterflies and other insects, as well as sunbirds. The tree is host to members of the Nymphalidae butterfly family.
- Fruits are eaten by humans and various animals, including monkeys, baboons and fruit-eating birds such as Cape Parrots. Fruits can also be used to make jellies and alcoholic beverages.

As a garden tree

The tree plays a significant role in the consolidation of sand dunes and can be propagated from seeds and cuttings. Seeds are best sown in late spring or summer. Before sowing, treat seeds with pre-emergence fungicide to prevent damping off and mildew. Plant in well-drained, composted soils, water moderately and never allow to dry out completely. Trees grow at a slow to average rate, under favourable conditions up to 600 mm per year. Fruits can be expected from 6 years of age.