

When the seedlings get to a "3-leaf" stage, plant them out into larger black nursery bags. Take care not to damage the young roots when transplanting into larger bags. Keep them in the bags for about a year before you transplant them into your chosen spot in the garden.

Water well once you have transplanted them into the garden - for at least the first 5 weeks give them water frequently. If you are interested in growing them from cuttings - It is advisable to use a root stimulating hormone powder like Seradix. Plant the cuttings into river sand during the spring, water well and when they have taken and grown a bit, transplant them into the garden.

Uses and value

The wild medlar is a traditional food plant in Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa. The fruit has the potential to improve nutrition, (Each 100g fresh fruit is said to contain 3.7g vitamin C, 1.4g protein, 28g carbohydrate, 28mg sodium, 0.61mg nicotinic acid and high levels of calcium and magnesium), boost food security, foster rural development and support sustainable land care. The fruit is consumed ripe from the tree or the pulp may be dried and stored for later use. Some communities also roast the seeds to eat while fruit can be fermented to make traditional beer. Local communities have discovered that when the fruit is mixed with water and a little sugar, it produces an acceptable substitute for apple

sauce. Juice from the fruit can be used for flavouring porridge and a local type of vinegar can also be produced from the fruit.

The tree is a source of food for livestock and plains game, for example, goats and antelope which graze on the leaves; monkeys, baboons, squirrels and bush pigs eat the fruit when ripe. Butterflies, honey bees and flies visit the flowers.

Traditional healers have been known to use the properties of the tree to cure various ailments. An infusion of the roots and leaves of *Vangueria infausta* is used to treat malaria, chest pains and pneumonia. The infusion is also used as a purgative to treat ringworms. It is also believed to be a good snakebite remedy. Pounded leaves are applied to tickbite sores on livestock and pets to speed up healing and it's also used to treat swellings on the legs and inflammation of the navel in children. The tree however is believed to possess powers that exclude it from being a source of fuelwood. It is believed that it could cause cattle to bear only male offspring.

*After getting all this knowledge about *Vangueria infausta*, and if you still don't find this tree on your property, consider growing one today!*

TREE OF THE YEAR 2015

Botanical: *Vangueria infausta*.

Common English Name: Velvet wild medlar/African medlar

Shona: Munjiro, Munzviro or Munzviriwa

Ndebele: Umviyo



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Vangueria infausta is a small to medium deciduous tree or shrub with height varying from 3 to 8 metres (see Figure 1). It can be single or multi-stemmed with yellowish brown bark, smooth and peeling in irregular small strips. This tree species is one of the popular veld fruits that has been enjoyed by many generations in Zimbabwe. It has been a forest delicacy for shepherds and cattle herders as they move about in the pastures. *Vangueria infausta*, the wild medlar or African medlar, is a species of plant in the family Rubiaceae, which is native to the southern and eastern Afro-tropics.

Derivation of Botanical name:

Vangueria: Derived from the Madagascan word for a genus of flowering plants in the family Rubiaceae.

infausta: bad luck/unlucky or disastrous; probably referring to the magical powers it is believed to have.

The specific name *infausta* alludes to the misfortune believed to result from its use as firewood.

Description

Bark: The bark of *Vangueria infausta* is grey and smooth, becoming roughish and longitudinally grooved with age.



Figure 2: Branches of *V. infausta* with ripe fruit

Leaves: Young branches and leaves are velvety hairy. When older, the leaves often appear twisted and are rough to the touch. The leaves are often infested with distinctly stalked lesions.



Figure 3: Flowers of *V. infausta*



Figure 4: Banchlet of *V. infausta* showing young fruit & leaves

Flowers: Soft velvety, acorn-shaped buds appear either before or simultaneously with the new leaves. These will open into small, greenish white to yellowish flowers which occur along the short lateral branches (see Figures 3 & 4). In Zimbabwe as well as in most parts of southern Africa, the tree flowers from September to November.



Figure 6: *V. infausta* ripening fruit



Figure 5: *V. infausta* seed

Fruit and seed: The *V. infausta* fruits are borne along the branches and held below the leaves. They are almost round, glossy dark-green when young and brown when ripe. Mature fruit can get up to 45 millimeters in diameter. Ripe fruit is light brown, soft and fleshy with a leathery skin that encloses 3-5 seeds embedded in the soft pulp (Figures 5 & 6)). Fruits can be found on the plant from January to April.

Habitat and distribution

The tree can be found in woodlands, scrubs, on kopjes or in sandy valleys. It is also common in open, exposed grasslands. In Zimbabwe it is mostly found in areas stretching from the western, central, eastern and southern parts of the country, usually as part of Miombo woodlands.

Growing Vangueria infausta

Vangueria infausta is normally grown from seed. Young plants transplant well but must receive regular watering for the first 5 weeks after transplanting. Growth rate is generally slow, growing 40-50 cm each year.

How to grow Vangueria infausta

Take the seeds from off the tree and not from the ground as these will probably be infested with parasites. Allow to dry. Soak seeds overnight and plant out into seedling trays or soil-potted containers the next day. Fill the trays or containers with river sand and cover the seeds with a thin layer of soil. Keep moist during germination. An approximate success germination of 80% can be expected.