

Medicinal Plant Images

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Figure 1. *Acanthosicyos horridus* (commonly known as nara melon) is a member of the watermelon family that grows most prevalently in the coastal regions of the Namib desert, Namibia. It also occurs as far south as Northern Cape province in South Africa and as far north as southern Angola. The fruit can be eaten raw although it contains cucurbitacins (which irritate the mouth) and was traditionally eaten dried. The nuts inside the fruit have been a staple diet of the Topnaar people of the Namib Desert for millennia.^[1,2] Nara also has uses in traditional medicine. The fresh fruit is used to relieve stomach pains, oils from the seeds are used to protect from sunburn and as a moisturiser, and a decoction of the roots is used in the treatment of a wide variety of ailments including nausea, stomach disorders, STI's, kidney disorders, arteriosclerosis, wounds and chest pains.^[1] This photograph was taken in the Namib Desert near Walvis Bay, Namibia in December 2012 by Dr Ian Cock.



Figure 2. *Syzygium leubmannii* leaves and flowers. *Syzygium* is a large genus of evergreen flowering plants of the family Myrtaceae which consists of approximately 500 species. Plants of this genus are widespread, occurring in tropical and subtropical regions of South-East Asia, Australia and Africa. Many *Syzygium* species produce edible fruits and berries (eg. *Syzygium jambos*, commonly known as rose apple). In the commercially most important species *Syzygium aromaticum* (clove), the unopened flower bud is used as a spice. This plant also has uses in traditional medicine due to its anaesthetic properties.^[3] The antibacterial activity of *S. aromaticum* is also well known. Numerous studies have reported on the antibacterial^[4] and antifungal^[5] activities of oils and extracts from this plant. Other *Syzygium* species from Africa^[6] South East Asia (*Syzygium jambos*),^[7] India (*Syzygium lineare* and *Syzygium cumini*)^[8] and Australia^[9–13] have also been shown to have antimicrobial activity. Recent reports have also highlighted *Syzygium australe* (Bush Cherry) and *Syzygium leubmannii* (Riberry) extracts as having exceptionally high antioxidant contents.^[14] Antioxidants have been associated with the prevention of cancer, cardiovascular disease and neurological degenerative disorders.^[15–17] They are also linked with anti-diabetic bioactivities and have been associated with the reduction of obesity. Antioxidants can directly scavenge free radicals, protecting cells against oxidative stress related damage to proteins, lipids and nucleic acids.^[18] Thus the *Syzygium*s have potential in the treatment of a significant number of diseases and medical conditions related to cellular redox state. This photograph was taken in Brisbane, Australia in 2014 by Dr Ian Cock.

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