



FACT SHEET

Healing Properties of Indigenous Plants

- by Ann Meyer

As the interest in the indigenous plants of South Africa is growing so is the interest in their healing properties. This has been a source of knowledge amongst the sangomas of the country for generations.

There is great concern about the over utilisation of these resources in our natural areas and the effect this is having on certain species of plant. Silverglen Nursery in Chatsworth is working hard in this area, not only to inform but to ensure that the plants in the wild are not wiped out. To start with I thought that I would address a common plant that we all know and probably have in our gardens and the benefits it can have for you and your family.



Bulbine frutescens more commonly known as *Bulbinella* is a common rockery plant in South African gardens. Long, thin leaves filled with a jelly-like juice and delicate yellow flowers growing up the stem make this a most attractive plant. It grows quickly and easily and thrives in almost any soil as long as it has full sun. To propagate it, simply pull a piece off an established plant, stick it in the ground and it will be a striking clump in no time at all. According to Margaret Roberts, A-Z of Herbs, the *bulbinella* plant can be used for a multitude of ailments mostly related to skin problems. A squeeze of the succulent leaf results in a juice that oozes out which can be smeared on insect bites and stings. It takes away the itching of a mozzie bite almost instantaneously and is used in my house with much success. The juice can also be applied to burns, blisters, rashes, itches, cracked lips, fever blisters, cold sores, mouth ulcers, cracked fingers, scrapes, cuts and grazes.

Many species of the bulbines that occur are common to Kwa Zulu Natal, another commonly known bulbine species is *Bulbine natalensis*. This can readily be seen when driving through Hillcrest at the moment in many of the indigenous gardens that the Outer West Local Council have been developing. This plant has a broad fleshy leaf arranged in a rosette, the flowers are similar to the *Bulbine frutescens* but it seems to prefer shady areas to more sunny spots. According to Elsa Pooley, Wild Flowers, Kwa Zulu Natal and the Eastern Region, this plant is used in traditional medicine to treat skin ailments, vomiting, diarrhoea, urinary complaints and as a charm.

