

DEPARTMENT OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY

NEW LIST OF “TREES OF THE YEAR”

Arbor Day, which originated in the United States of America in 1872, has been celebrated in South Africa since 1983. This event grew so popular that it was expanded to an Arbor Week in 1999, and has become one of the important events on the South African calendar. To help increase public awareness during Arbor Week the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) has created a list of “Trees of the Year” to serve as focus for these celebrations. A common tree species was chosen for each year’s Arbor week as well as a less common species. The original Tree of the Year list (which extended to 2015) was drafted after extensive consultation between DWAF, the South African Nurseries Association (SANA) and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

The original rationale was that each Arbor Week should focus on a common “Tree of the Year” that would be suitable for planting in many regions around the country, and a less common or rare “Tree of the Year”. Arbor Week grew so popular, however, that in recent years some of the species listed in the column of common trees could not be propagated on a scale that meet the increased public demand. SANA therefore requested DWAF in January 2007 to review the Tree of the Year list. This review involving DWAF, SANA and SANBI resulted in a new list that extends to the year 2020. The new list generated also contains a common species for each year that are not only suitable for planting in many regions but also easier to propagate at commercial scale, and one or more uncommon or rare tree species for each year as well. For 2007 the current Trees of the Year namely Common Wild Currant (*Rhus pyroides*) and Poison Bride’s Bush (*Pavetta schumanniana*) will remain unchanged, and the new list only extends from 2008.

It was decided not to drop any trees from the previous Tree of the Year list, because nurseries begin to propagate Trees of the Year several years before each Arbor Week event. All the uncommon tree species on the previous list were retained as well as all the common species, but most of the latter are now grouped with the uncommon species.