

## African Wattle: a boon for honeybees

---

### *Peltophorum africanum*

*The Afrikaans name, Huilboom, not to be confused with the Huilboerboom, Schotia brachypetala, references the spittlebugs that parasitize the pods.*

The African Wattle is an attractive, under-utilized tree that has great value for cattle and game farmers, and those who farm bees too, for the flowers produce copious quantities of nectar and pollen for honeybees. These semi- to deciduous trees are commonly single-stemmed but can be multi-stemmed, with a rounded to spreading crown when mature and contorted, crooked branches from growing from low-down. Despite this, the African Wattle provides generous shade. A rather open canopy forms if grown close to other trees.

Young bark is smooth and grey, but it ages beautifully, producing longitudinal fissures down its length. These add to the rough, attractive texture of this tree – a plus when winter strips it down to a bare skeleton.

**Flowers:** Yellow flowers have crinkly margins borne in erect sprays (up to 24 cm long). Flowering lasts for just a short period and takes place anytime from November to June. Flowering begins at 2 years and can be sparse, but is reliably profuse at around 5 years of age. Dense bunches of yellow-brown pods, pointed at both ends, hang in heavy clusters from December to July, providing an attractive display. Bright green leaves are twice-compound and soft. Non-aggressive roots make it a good street and car park tree. The African Wattle does not enjoy a cool, wet summer.

**Diagnostic feature:** twigs, growth tip, leaf stalk, flower stalks and back of sepals are covered with reddish-brown hairs.

**Distribution range:** not endemic to SA. Gauteng, KZN, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West. Widespread in tropical and southern Africa, in South Africa widespread in the northern provinces and northern KwaZulu-Natal.

**Size:** 13 m

**Flowering:** Sept – April; spring summer autumn

**Speed:** moderate to fast

**Frost:** moderate

**Drought:** moderate to high

**Water needs:** moderate, low

**Light:** sun; semi-shade

**Garden situation:** sun; semi-shade; sandy soils; shade tree; street tree; woodland; wildlife: bees, insects, birds, butterfly host plant for Charaxes

**Habitat:** grassland; woodland; rocky places; urban streets