

Devil's Backbone

(*Kalanchoe daigremontiana*)



Alternative Common Name

Mexican Hat Plant, Alligator Plant (English), Duiwel se Ruggraat (Afrikaans).

Description

It is a succulent. Plants grow up to 1m tall and have opposite, fleshy “leaves”. The leaves also called “phylloclades”. They are long, wider in the middle and shaped like a lance tip. They are green above and blotched with purple underneath.

Where does this species come from?

Madagascar

How does it spread?

Dispersal is by seeds and by plantlets that form on the edge of the leaves. It may also develop roots on it's stalk as high as 10-15cm above the ground. The leaves at the top of the plant may become heavy, causing the stalk to bend. Then the lateral roots will enter the soil and form a new plant.

Why is it a problem?

It threatens the natural ecosystem because it spreads prolifically. **All parts of the plant contain a very toxic steroid, known as daigremontianin. The poison will affect humans, stocks and small animals.** Daigremontianin is responsible for an estimated 33 % of cattle mortalities relating to plant poisoning.

Does the plant have any uses?

In traditional medicine of tropical countries the juice is used internally for diarrhoea and “all kinds of fever”. An ointment prepared from the expressed juice of the leaves mixed with oil or shea butter is used externally for treatment of ulcers, abscesses, burns or poorly healing wounds.

How to eradicate the plant?

This plant needs to be removed just like the “Mother of Thousands”. It seems indestructible and is extremely difficult to eradicate as the seeds remain viable in the soil for many years. **DO NOT SLASH.** If you do, the seeds will disperse and germinate where they land. Each individual plant has to be pulled out very carefully, preferably before seeding. The removed plants must be placed in bags. Home owners are requested to contact the Honorary Rangers who will remove the bags.

Please do not put these plants on the roads as vehicle tyres can distribute seeds around Marloth Park.

Follow ups are extremely important as regrowth can occur for many years.

