



**indigenous plants  
for resilient  
futures**

**With support from Goethe-Institut's  
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“The work we do is about reviving indigenous knowledge and practice. And some say we revive culture. Or we want to become more cultural. And when we do so, we run the risk of being accused of living in the past or going back to the past, but I want to show you why going back to indigenous knowledge and practice and culture is the work of the future and not of the past. We work to revive indigenous knowledge, traditional ways of knowing and understanding. And at the very core of those traditions is the understanding of how everything is connected to one another. That the river is connected to the mountain, and the mountain is connected to the elephant, and the elephant is connected to the tree; the same tree that you and me are connected to. It is the original form of understanding how humans belong to this bigger community of life and so when we say, let’s go back, to learn from indigenous knowledge, we are saying let’s refer to that text, of our elders who used to do it, and who can remember the understanding of being connected, so that once again, from now as we go forward, we go forward in the mode of being connected to life.”

Method Gundidza



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# ancestral wisdom for a resilient future

Method Gundidza (Earthlore Foundation)

*Note: This is an edited version of a longer article, 'Grains of Hope,' based on Earthlore's engagement in Bikita, Zimbabwe, published in Resurgence Magazine in January/February 2021. It can be found at:*

<https://www.resurgence.org/magazine/article5663-grains-of-hope.html>

The combined crises of COVID-19 and climate change give us pause to reflect on how the lessons of our ancestors can be applied to support our resilience and food sovereignty<sup>1</sup>. Extreme weather events linked to climate change are affecting farmers' ability to produce food, while COVID-19 has dramatically disrupted people's access to food.

Our elders hold knowledge about how they built resilience into their lives over generations. Traditionally, people planted a diverse mix of crops in their fields. That way, in case of drought, floods, pests or other shocks, at least some of the crops will survive. Traditional grains such as sorghum and millet are extremely drought tolerant crops, and are able to grow in poor soils. Also, commercial crops require the purchase of inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, pesticide and

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<sup>1</sup> Food sovereignty is "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Nyéléni Declaration on Food Sovereignty, 2007).

herbicide—and many of these became unavailable during the COVID crisis. But local, traditional crop varieties are usually suited to our lands and climate, so they don't require those inputs and we can save the seed ourselves.

There are reasons why people have replaced traditional crops with commercial varieties. For example, millet is labour-intensive. With the arrival of imported maize, which is much less labour-intensive, many abandoned millet. Second, dietary preferences have shifted, as people got used to 'white pap' made from maize.

Returning to traditional crop cultivation means also learning some of the ancestral practices associated with harvesting, processing and cooking the traditional foods, as well as saving the seeds. Often, there were ceremonies associated with different aspects of the cycle. These practices and ceremonies sometimes required the use of specific plants from the wild, for example to make baskets for winnowing the grains. In addition, during "the hunger season," when farmers are waiting for the harvest, the wild fruits and wild vegetables that grow in the mountains, wetlands and forests come to our aid. Thus protection of the wild is also important, to ensure access to those plants. There is a deep relationship between the crops, the seeds, the food and the wild.

One of the key lessons from our elders has been the importance of collective solutions. Because millet is labour-intensive, it requires a collective effort to harvest it. Traditionally, community members moved from farmstead to farmstead to help each other to harvest and process the millet. This tradition, which had been disappearing, provides an important moment of reciprocity, as well as the chance to socialize over some local millet beer. By bringing back our ancestral knowledge, seeds and practices, we can strengthen relationships and create spaces for collective problem-solving.

Another lesson from our elders is related to planning for the future. People used to save enough millet for two years. This meant they were prepared for emergencies (such as droughts or conflicts). They were also able to let fields rest and let soils regenerate.

In the memories of our elders lies a vision for the future – a future in which communities are food sovereign, secure in our traditions and resilient enough to thrive in unstable times.



“We have thousands of indigenous crops that we are not growing. Because we adopted a system that we don’t know how it operates. It’s forcing us to take all these other foods, that are not ours... The big industrial agriculture system is controlling us. How is it controlling us? Through the seeds. You cannot keep the seeds, you have to go and buy more seeds. So, you are trapped, every time you go back to get the seeds. ... Who makes the fertilizer, the sprays, the seeds? It comes as a package. These companies get the money. Have they ever built a school, a clinic, a road in your community? Where are they taking the profits? To their countries. And you are getting poor. Because you are not growing the crops from Africa like sorghum and millet that don’t need spray, that don’t need much maintenance. You will never become independent if you are depending on external sources.”

John Nzira







“In language I think there are already indications of how we can reimagine our connectedness to one another and our connectedness to nature because the language is already there.”

Mvuselelo Ngcoya



“Plants are named by a prefix mu, for most trees in our language they have a mu prefix, which describes “somebody who can” and/or “don’t do this”. So, I’ll give you of an example, I spoke about weeds earlier on. My mother brought a wild plant called musarima, so the name of the plant is musarima, it’s saying don’t plough, and what it says is that if you don’t plough, then that plant germinates, or don’t weed so that plant survives.”

Method Gundidza



# mupo

“Mupo is very important. In the Venda language, Mupo is a word which explains all the natural creations of the origin, all the creations of that we call universe. In Venda, Mupo is not a manmade thing. Mupo, when we look at the soil, it’s mupo. When we look at the stones, it’s mupo. When we see the river, it’s mupo. That sound, which we hear in the river, it’s a mupo sound. When we see the plants, from the grass, from everything that germinates and grows, up to the big tree, it’s mupo. It’s not made by human beings. When we see the forest, it’s mupo. When we see the mountain, it’s mupo creation. When we see up there, we see the stars, it’s mupo. It’s the light of mupo. When we see the moon, it’s a mupo light. When we see animals, insects, reptiles, it’s mupo. When we see how all this interacts and has a relationship, that we need water from the river, it’s a mupo way; the river is mupo, ourselves, we are mupo. When the mother has a big tummy, it’s mupo which makes that. When all these months are going, up to when the baby is born, it’s mupo. When we see human beings, we are mupo. When we see the moon, communicating in women, where there’s a flow, it’s mupo. Mupo is everything which we see and what is beyond. You can’t touch mupo. And mupo is the ancestors’ spirit when they go away, they go to the spirit. Mupo is also the spirit.”

*Note: This is an extract from the online event, Decolonising Our Relationships with Plants, where Vho-Mphatheleni Makaulule explains this important concept in Venda culture.*

# HOW COLONIALISM DISRUPTED and continues to disrupt PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH PLANTS

**FORCED REMOVALS**

**TAXES FORCED PEOPLE INTO WAGE LABOUR**

**COLONIAL SCHOOLING INTERRUPTED INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING**

**INDIGENOUS PLANTS REMOVED FOR PLANTATIONS**

**INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE OF HEALING PLANTS EXPLOITED FOR CORPORATE GAIN**

**CLINIC**

**SUPERMARKET SAVE!**

**INDUSTRIAL FOOD MARKETED AS 'MODERN'**

**TRADITIONAL FOODS CALLED "POVERTY FOODS"**

# the sacredness of plants

Esther Adebunayo Obasa, with quotes from Makhadzi Vho-Mphatheleni Makaulule (both of Dzomo la Mupo)

“We are constructed to become consumers of plants. Because when we see the plant, we see that I can pick the fruit, I can pick the roots, I can pick the leaves, whatever is there, to use it. We see the tree that is a timber that I have to harvest. We don’t see the plants in a holistic way. In an indigenous way, a plant is a holistic thing. A plant is not only to provide food. A plant is not only to provide shade. A plant is more [than this].”

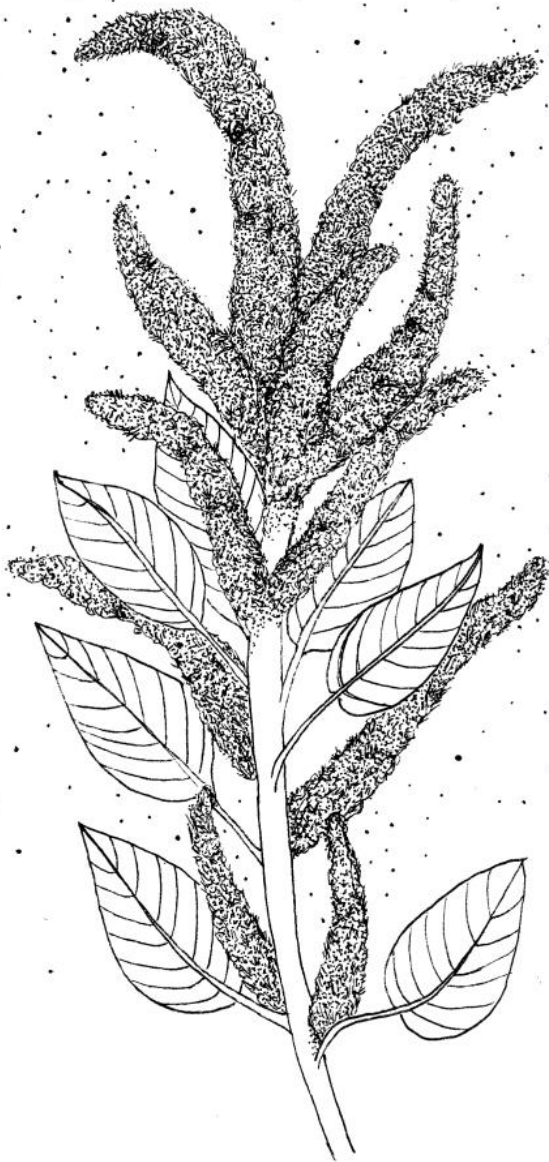
Traditionally, the Vhavenda respect all plants as an element that carries spirituality; when the Vhavenda connect to their ancestors and their creator, plants are used. The processes of planting and germinating are sacred because of their strong spiritual connection. When they sow, they respect the seeds and the plants, as well as the garden where they are planted. The consumption of the plants as food is also spiritual, and it matters who picked them and how they are picked. It is important to do all of these things in the right way, with the regulations passed from elders to the young adults, so they carry the tradition and preserve culture and spiritual connection to be in harmony.

For example, amaranth (*vowa* in Tshivenda) is a well-known cultivated plant among the Vhavenda. It is so widely cultivated, in fact, that the presence of amaranth in the yard can be considered an indicator of a Vhavenda homestead. One common use of amaranth is for food, as a relish to accompany porridge. It also has many medicinal uses amongst the Vhavenda, including for newborn babies and for women's menstrual cycles. Beyond food and medicine, amaranth has a spiritual dimension as well. It is cultivated around the cattle kraal as protection against bad omens, theft, illness, etc. It is also an ingredient in traditional snuff (*fo/a* in Tshivenda), which is used to communicate with the ancestors.

Bambara groundnut (*phonda* in Tshivenda), another important food crop, also has spiritual functions. It can only be planted at certain times, as it is believed to interfere with the rain if planted incorrectly. It is also used to make a traditional drink for dancers during rituals or other spiritual dances.

Thus one key aspect of decolonizing our relationships with plants is to view them holistically, and see them as multi-dimensional beings. "Decolonization [as] I understand it, is a path which is leading us to clean the mindset of an African, the mindset of the indigenous all over the world. Because through colonization, there is this thing which has been planted in the mind, ... it's many aspects which we have been colonized, but as the plant is the root, decolonization is a path which is leading us to clean or to un-brainwash our minds, because our minds through colonization, through all experiences which we have passed through, our minds have been constructed to see the plants [only] as the things which we consume. Because this is also the impact of colonizing our mind, that we no longer see a holistic interconnectedness."

# amaranth *(Amaranthus spp.)*



isiZulu and siSwati: imbuya  
Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana: thepe, theepe  
Afrikaans: misbredie  
Tshivenda: vowa  
isiXhosa: unomdlomboyi  
Xitsonga: theyke, cheke

**Amaranth** can be green or purple/red. It is one of the most common vegetables in Africa. Several varieties of amaranth are indigenous to Africa, and it has been eaten in South Africa for centuries. While people do plant amaranth at times, it more commonly just pops up as a “volunteer’ crop after the rains, both in the wild and in cultivated fields. Amaranth is fairly drought tolerant and does best in warm weather. It grows quickly, and produces large yields of leaves.

Young leaves can be eaten raw or cooked, while more mature leaves should be cooked as they can become bitter. Amaranth greens are delicious when cooked with a little bit of onion and tomato, or with ground peanuts. To preserve the leaves, they can be dried (either raw or after a few seconds in boiling water) and stored in a sealed container in the kitchen.

The seeds can be cooked as a gluten-free grain, or ground into a flour.

Amaranth greens and seeds are extremely nutritious. In fact, the leaves have more nutrients than almost any other leafy greens - much more than cabbage or spinach. They are rich in iron, protein, vitamin C, calcium, phosphorus and beta-carotene. All of these are important to keep us healthy.

# amaranth recipe

This recipe makes about 6 servings.

large bunch of amaranth (approx. 500g)

2 medium tomatoes

1 small onion

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1-2 chillies (optional)

Salt to taste

Rinse amaranth.

Place it in a saucepan and let it cook for a few minutes.

Add chopped onions and tomatoes, turning your pot to allow everything to cook evenly.

Add chopped chillies and oil and salt.

Serve as a side or main dish.

Tips: You can also stir fry amaranth. Start by heating your oil, then add onions, peppers and mushrooms. Cook a few minutes, and then add the amaranth and cook until wilted.

It is also delicious to add pounded peanuts to the amaranth.







“I was talking to my mother last night when she prepared a wild vegetable for me. And she took me through the whole story about the plants that are in the field. They have been weeded, to give the other preferred plants a chance to grow, then they come back when the preferred plant has grown way up there. And she said when they come back, they are not weeds any more, they are food. So, she went to harvest a combination of weeds, wild vegetables, otherwise known as weeds. She came, she prepared and she brought the plants themselves, and she said, this leaf is this one, this leaf is that one.”

Method Gundidza



“We are abandoning our own food, and what we are missing is the importance of why we need to grow indigenous. Why should we be growing our own food in this region? First, anything that is indigenous, it doesn’t take as much water as something else. Those crops are adapted to our climate, to our environment, so they don’t consume as much water... Second, it’s good for us. ... Because the plants that surround us are actually medicinal. We are eating our medicine... [Third] it’s also good to grow indigenous. It’s easy...you can grow a lot of things in a small space, to feed your family... They grow easily because they complement one another.”

Siphiwe Sithole



# bambara groundnut

or Jugo bean (*Vigna subterranea*)

isiZulu: izindlubu

Sesotho: ditloo-marapo

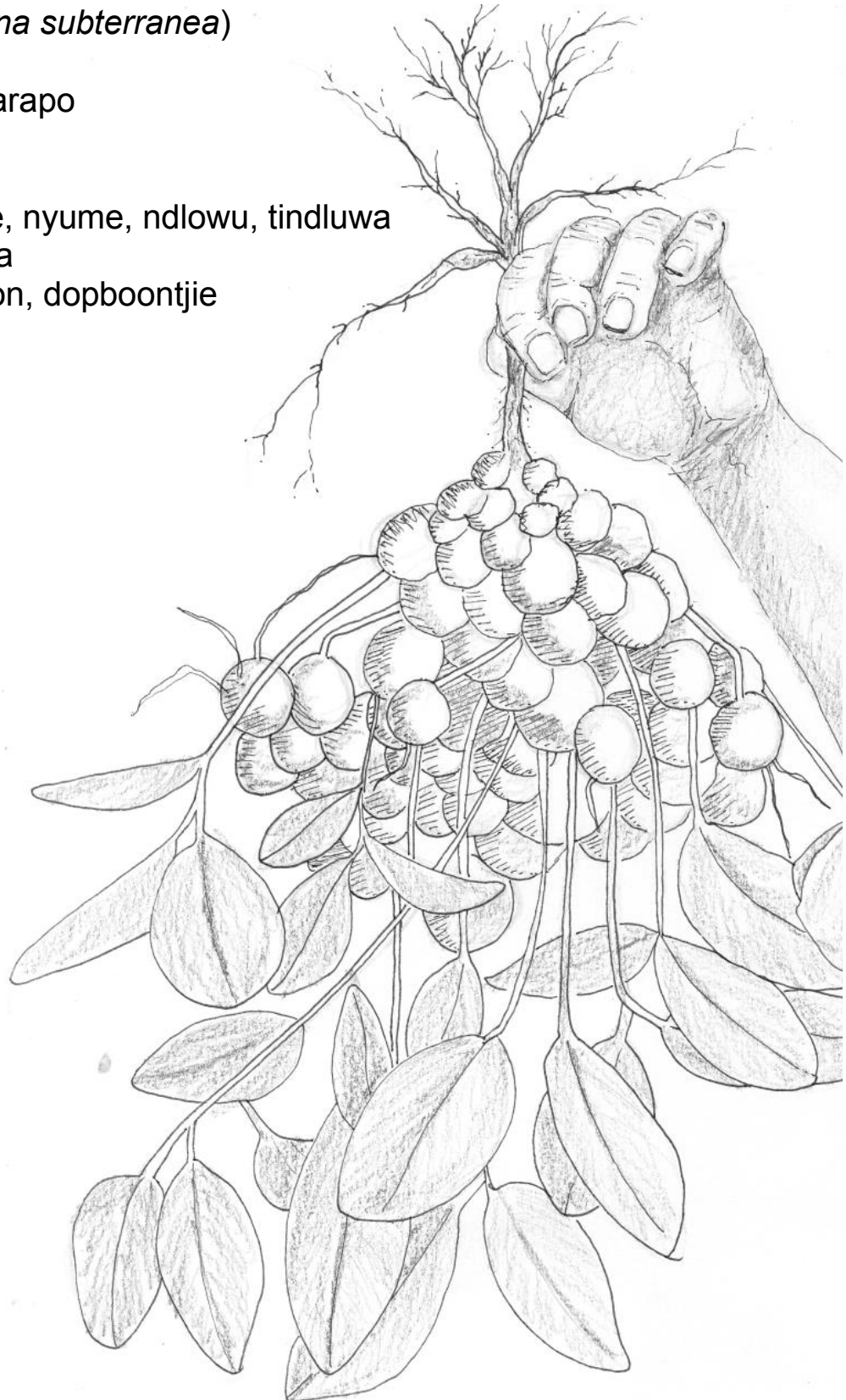
Setswana: ditloo

siSwati: tindlubu

Xitsonga: kochane, nyume, ndlowu, tindluwa

Tshivenda: phonda

Afrikaans: jugofoon, dopboontjie



**The Bambara groundnut**, which grows underground like peanuts, originated in West Africa. It is an important staple food in many parts of the continent and is often grown together with maize and pumpkins. They grow well even under drought conditions and contribute to soil fertility by fixing nitrogen. They come in an array of sizes and colours, including white, tan, dark red and black.

Bambara groundnuts can be boiled, roasted and even ground into a flour. They have a delicious taste, sort of a mix between beans and peanuts. They are often served as a snack, but also feature in dishes where they are mixed with ground peanuts and/or grains such as maize. Bambara groundnuts can be used fresh, or dried for storage. Sometimes they are pounded into flour and mixed into porridge. In some countries, they are blended with water to make a nutmilk, which may be used for weaning.

Bambara groundnut is very nutritious. It is high in protein and fibre, with a range of vitamins and minerals such as calcium, iron and potassium.

The Bambara groundnut is highly valued throughout Africa. It is celebrated with harvest rituals in some places, and has other ritual uses as well. In some countries, it has a role in traditional medicine.

# **bambara groundnut recipe**

This recipe makes about 4-6 servings.

250g or 1 cup dry Bambara groundnut  
1L water  
Salt

Rinse Bambara groundnuts and pick out any stones.

Soak them in water overnight or for at least 8 hours.

Boil the Bambara groundnuts until they are soft but still maintain their shape (not mushy). This will take about 1 hour (start checking after 40 minutes). Discard cooking water.

Add salt.

Dish your beans and eat them as a snack or add to salads.

# tinkhobe recipe

## samp with pounded peanuts

This recipe makes about 12 servings.

500g samp (stamp)  
150g Bambara groundnut  
100g cowpeas  
100g whole peanuts/ groundnuts  
125g pounded peanuts  
Salt to taste

Rinse and soak samp and Bambara groundnuts overnight.  
Rinse and soak cowpeas separately, overnight.  
Boil samp and Bambara groundnuts until they are half cooked (30-40 minutes).  
Add cowpeas and whole peanuts and boil until almost cooked (20-30 minutes).  
Add salt and pounded peanuts.  
Let your tinkhobe simmer until everything is cooked.  
Use a wooden spoon to mix everything into a one pot meal to eat on its own.

Tips: Tinkhobe can be served hot or cold. This is a protein-loaded dish that is enjoyed on its own.

# sorghum (*Sorghum spp.*)

isiZulu: amabele

isiXhosa: amazimba

Sesotho: mahlaka, semela

Tshivenda: makhaha

Sepedi: mabelethoro

Setswana: mabele

siSwati: emabele

**Sorghum** has been eaten for thousands of years in Africa. It was used to make porridge and beer, long before maize was brought to the continent. It was an important staple food, providing energy and nutrients.

Sorghum is able to grow under many different conditions, from heavy rainfall to heat and drought. Sorghum can grow in sandy or clay soil, and marginal areas where other plants don't survive. It matures quickly, and some types can provide up to three harvests per year.

Sorghum is a good source of protein, B vitamins and minerals, such as potassium and phosphorus. Fermenting significantly increases the nutritional value of sorghum.

Different varieties of sorghum can be prepared in different ways. The whole grain can be cooked like rice. It can be coarsely milled and cooked as porridge - think of 'maltabella' or fermented *ting* - or finely milled as flour for baking. Sorghum is naturally gluten-free. The grains can also be popped like popcorn. And of course, it can be fermented for sorghum beer, *umqombothi* in isiZulu and isiXhosa. There is also a variety of sweet sorghum, that yields a sugary syrup.

Cultivating sorghum can be labour-intensive, so communities traditionally helped each other with planting or harvesting by working communally or cooperatively. This practice, called *ilima* in isiZulu and isiXhosa or *letsema* in Setswana, also provided an opportunity for community members to share news, teach lessons to young people and build unity. The host of the work party often provided food and/or sorghum beer in appreciation for the help.







“When we nurture a diversity of seeds, we nurture a diversity of food that we eat, but [also] of plants that also feed the soil. Plants don’t just feed people, they feed the soil too. The very same soil that feeds the plants, feeds us, but the plants feed the soil too, and that is the relationship.”

Method Gundidza



“These traditional seeds are an inheritance, forever. When you grow them, they become saviours of your life. These are connected to your ancestors, they are connected to you. Once you lose them, it is like you don’t have identity. How can you have an identity if you don’t know your own seeds, your indigenous seeds?”

John Nzira



“The nice thing with growing food in the African way is, you don’t grow one thing. So, there’s never a time where, in a family garden, you’re only going to have one type of crops. Never. Crop rotation was not necessarily something that was applied in Africa. Africa inter-cropped. ... so, we always planted these things, and we always ate well. There’s just so much creativity with African food. African food is not boring.”

Siphiwe Sithole



# wild wormwood (*Artemisia afra*)



Afrikaans: wilde als  
Setswana: lengana  
isiZulu and isiXhosa: umhlonyane  
Sesotho: lengana  
Tshivenda: tshifulathlobengo  
siSwati: mhlonyane

**Wild wormwood** is one of the oldest and best-known traditional medicinal plants in South Africa, with many uses amongst different communities all over the country. Some of these traditional uses include coughs and colds, respiratory problems, stomach ailments, poor appetite, headaches, bladder and kidney disorders, malaria, wound treatment, gout and diabetes. People take wild wormwood in different ways, including infusions/teas to drink, steam inhalation, inserting the plant into the nose (for colds and headaches) or the mouth (for toothaches), and poultices for external use. Sometimes it is used in combination with other medicinal plants. The taste of the tea is not so pleasant, so it is often sweetened with honey.

While there is limited scientific research available, much of it has confirmed the plant's medicinal value and demonstrated its antimicrobial, antioxidant, antimalarial, anti-inflammatory and other properties. Wild wormwood also has non-medicinal uses, for example as an insect repellent.

The plant is found across the country, in many different landscapes and communities. It can be recognized by its strong smell. Other members of the *Artemisia* family of plants, from other parts of the world, are also used medicinally.



“I just want to ask you to look at that plant and experience how you share breath with that plant. The breath that flows into that plant, comes out, flowing into you, out of you, back into that plant, and between you and that plant that you can see, in your proximity, you’re sharing breath, you’re sharing life. And that makes a plant a companion, a life companion.”

Method Gundidza



“It’s up to you as young people to actually educate the people about real food. You still have your mom, your aunt, your gogo who know how to do these things properly, so learn from them. Because there’s no classroom where they are going to teach you about indigenous African crops or about indigenous African food.”

Siphiwe Sithole



# connecting with plants in the city

“From a very practical perspective, something that I have tried to do with my own children in the city, is to plant, to have plants and to allow each child to have a look at a plant every day, or if they can’t, every two days or every week. And when they do that, and this is what I’ve experienced, they recognize how the plant is a living thing. So, we planted a pumpkin seed, with my son. We watered it over a period of time, into flowering, and it fruited, and when it did, my son came to me and he said, ‘but do you recognize that this plant is clever?’ I said ‘why?’. And he said, ‘it has hidden its baby under its leaves’. It’s because the small pumpkin was all covered by the pumpkin leaves, and he read it that the pumpkin plant is clever, it’s protecting and hiding its baby. And I think these are some small things [which show] that we are not, we can’t be outside of nature. That’s our very nature, that we are nature ourselves. But to nurture that relationship is to be present and to fully participate. So, some things we could do even in urban areas: recognize when it’s a full moon, recognize when it’s the new moon... In our cosmology, stars have got names, the full moon has got a name, the new moon has got a name. Whether you are in town, or in the village where I am right now, the moon is there, the stars are there. We have got flowers in our houses... if we have large plants in our houses, we can recognize how these plants recognize us too, when we recognize them. And these are small things we can do. We nurture that, and we recognize that we become friends with plants and with the cosmos.”

Method Gundidza

# background to this book

This booklet has been created as part of the project, 'Decolonising food for health and sustainability' and is part funded by The Goethe-Institut's 'Sustainable Together' project, which aims to support civil society initiatives that give greater visibility to sustainability and make effective contributions to improving the local environment. Sustainable Together is a collaboration between The Goethe-Institut South Africa and the British Council South Africa.

The project, 'Decolonising food for health and sustainability' recognizes that being able to grow the indigenous plants that people have traditionally used for food and medicine can be one of the pathways by which communities to enjoy greater food sovereignty and more control over their health. However, very few people hold such knowledge in urban centres. Therefore, the project sought to link people who have knowledge regarding the collection, cultivation and use of indigenous plants for food and medicine with communities struggling with food insecurity and poor health, in order to:

- Enable the sharing of traditional/ indigenous food and health knowledge with urban farmers;
- Build the farming/cultivation skills of community members using traditional/indigenous methods that do not rely on expensive inputs;
- Increase the knowledge of community members regarding nutrition and health, including the use of indigenous medicinal plants; and
- Support the promotion of the values that underpin traditional/indigenous relationships to plants, such as

our inter-relationship with the natural world and the spiritual connection to plants.

The project involved two training sessions with community members in Ivory Park, Johannesburg, organized with the assistance of Moeketsi Monaheng of Midrand Solidarity Economy Educators & Communication Cooperatives (MSEEC). The first, on 27 February 2021, was a training on the cultivation and benefits of indigenous plants for food and medicine, led by John Nzira of Ukuvuna. The second, on 6 March 2021, was a session on the preparation of foods and medicines from indigenous plants, led by Sphiwe Sithole of African Marmalade. There were lots of demonstrations of plants, seeds, and dishes at both sessions, so participants could see, touch and taste the foods and teas. We have included some of Sphiwe's recipes in this booklet.

We also held an online event, called 'Decolonising our relationships with plants' in order to share with a wider audience beyond Ivory Park. This involved three expert speakers, Makhadzi Vho-Mphatheleni Makaulule of Dzomo la Mupo; Method Gundidza, of Earthlore Foundation; and Mvuselelo Ngcoya, of UKZN. The conversation was facilitated by Busi Dlamini, and is available to watch on the Goethe Institute YouTube page (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EVFtF0PDo>). Some of the wise words from that event are found throughout this booklet.

An important issue that came up during the course of this project was the absence of San and Khoi speakers from the online event programme. We recognise that this reinforces the exclusion that is all too familiar to people whose voices need to be heard on this topic. We apologise for perpetuating this pattern and would like to reiterate our commitment to be more inclusive in the future.



While the amount of information shared in the workshops and the online event would be enough to fill several volumes, this booklet provides a small taste of the rich knowledge the trainers, speakers and participants brought to the project. First, there is a piece by Method Gundidza on the value of ancestral wisdom in building food sovereignty and resilience. Then there is a piece by Esther Adebusayo Obasa and Vho-Mphatheleni Makaulule on the sacredness of plants. There is also information about three important indigenous food plants: amaranth, Bambara groundnuts, and sorghum; as well as the medicinal plant, wild wormwood. These are accompanied by Sphiwe Sithole's recipes, and by illustrations of the plants. In addition, we have included a graphic illustration on how colonialism disrupted, and continues to disrupt, people's relationships with plants. This helps to explain the violent processes that deprived many people in urban areas of access to their ancestral knowledge.

We hope this booklet is interesting and useful, and that it will stimulate further exploration of the wisdom of indigenous plants. While we ourselves are not indigenous knowledge holders, we have attempted to provide a platform for those who are to share that knowledge with others.

Please feel free to share this booklet with others who might benefit from it. Limited printed copies are available in English, isiZulu and Setswana, and electronic versions can be found at [www.wewillalleat.org](http://www.wewillalleat.org) and can be shared freely. Enjoy!

Brittany Kesselman and Claire Rousell,  
**We Will All Eat**

**We Will All Eat** is a collective that seeks to broaden and deepen discussions on food and social justice in South Africa, in order to strengthen movements for food system - and broader social - transformation.

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# closing statement

Tribute to Gogo Qho Mthethwa, whose passion for indigenous plants inspired this project and lives on in the many seeds she planted:

*This excerpt is taken from the article, "Gogo Qho: A visionary farmer and conservationist who refused to be a prisoner of history," by Mvuselelo Ngcoya, Narendran Kumarakulasingam and Brittany Kesselman, published on 14 January 2021 in the Daily Maverick. Available online at:*

*<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-01-14-gogo-qho-a-visionary-farmer-and-conservationist-who-refused-to-be-a-prisoner-of-history/>*

Gogo Qho was happy to share her encyclopedic knowledge of traditional and indigenous plants. She was often called upon by academics to participate in research projects or to lecture students, though she had no formal academic training and many people in her surrounding community called her crazy and old-fashioned for preferring to grow her own food and medicine. ...

Her lush garden, we would learn over time, was not simply a home to forgotten plants. It was a testament to hard work and an unrelenting struggle to make manifest a prophetic vision for a reparative future. It also manifested her worldview in which every living thing had a place—she tended and befriended the weeds, insects, birds and other creatures in the garden, those commonly seen as beneficial as well as those which others would deem pests or threats. ...

Her cultivation was shaped by the desire to be free of the agro-industrial food system. Simply put, she strove to grow what she ate and eat what she grew. Constantly drawing our attention to the food system's effect on our bodies and on our social relations, she would urge us to do the same. As she once

asked, “how can you claim to be free if you are not in control of what is on your plate?” ...

Although we will miss her, she lives on in our minds and hearts, in our fields through her seeds, and in our computers through her words and vision. We marvel at the life of creativity, imagination and courage that she lived.



“Aa. The knowledge shared here is from the memories of the living libraries of knowledge, by which we mean the Elders. We cannot have this knowledge without them, so, let us learn from them before they are gone. Aaa.”

Makhadzi Vho-Mphatheleni Makaulule