

# Trees for the Karoo Veld

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*Dene Coetzee was a wholesale nurseryman for over 30 years on a farm outside Paarl, specializing in trees and other hardy plants. At the end of 2005 he and his family sold up in the Boland and moved to a sheep and cattle farm near Nieu-Bethesda, in die Graaff-Reinet district. He thus writes from practical experience gathered over many years.*

As one drives through the Karoo landscape of endless plains, koppies and rocky mountains, a noticeable feature seen at regular intervals are windmills, together with cement or corrugated iron reservoirs and a number of drinking troughs.

Usually the Merino sheep stand grouped around these watering points. In high summer, when the sun scorches down, these sheep stand, with their heads tucked under other sheep's bellies, to lessen the pounding heat. This is the only shade these poor animals can find.

Why, one wonders, has the farmer not made provision for shade? When the reservoir overflows, a gently-sloping furrow could distribute this excess water to irrigate a

number of trees. All that is needed is a small camp with a stock proof fence around it to keep the animals out until the trees are large enough to take care of themselves. Then the farmer can remove the fence, the sheep can use the shade and the result will be contented sheep producing better wool, increased lambing percentages with heavier lambs, ready to be marketed sooner. Sounds like win-win situation, doesn't it?

Perhaps the reasons past generations and today's farmers did not plant more trees was ignorance of the type of tree to plant. It could surely not be financial, for the cost factor of planting trees is far outweighed by the many benefits. Drought could be put forward as a reason. This we do not buy as there are certain types of trees that are adaptable to Karoo conditions. Anyway, we are not suggesting to plant indiscriminately all over the veld, or around lands, where the effects of drought are felt the worst. No, we are suggesting the run-off from veld reservoirs, which is a common occurrence.

A farmer may claim his water is too brack, or the soil too salty. This may apply to the far western Karoo, but not to the central, eastern, southern and northern Karoo areas. Anyhow, here again, there are trees adapted to these conditions.

If every Merino farmer successfully planted 50 trees on his farm every year, imagine the difference it would make to the Karoo landscape, even in one generation. If sons learnt from fathers to plant trees, the tree-planting exercise could be carried forward from generation to generation. Pity we did not start in earnest 150 years ago! The Karoo could look different today.

Convinced? We hope so. If you are keen to get started; let's begin by advising that a tree to survive in the Karoo needs to be tolerant to:

- Periods of drought or lessened water supply
- Extreme cold from frost and even snow
- Brack water and salty soils
- Good care for the first few years

To complicate matters, there are indigenous trees which are the best to plant, but also aliens which do well in the Karoo and are permissible to establish and another group of aliens which we are forbidden to grow. The last group is an anomaly, for while they may be self-seeding and a menace in high rainfall areas, they certainly would pose no threat to the Karoo. But, the law is the law, thus it is best to forget about this list of trees.

The best time to plant out trees is in spring once the main danger of frost is past, as young plants will be susceptible for the first few months. By the time winter comes around they should have grown quite a bit and should be hardy enough to remain unprotected. Regular watering the first year is essential to get the root system developed as quickly as possible that the stem can begin to grow.

The preparation of planting holes is important to get the trees off to a flying start. Make holes 60 x 60 x 60 cms and use old kraal manure (2 spadefuls) and a handful of a balanced slow release fertilizer in the planting holes. Make sure the manure and fertilizer are not in contact with the root ball.

When planting, cut away the plastic bag or remove gently from the rigid pot. It the roots go round and round in circles in the container, score them through with a knife in two places from top to bottom, or untangle the root ball first to loosen the roots.

Good luck - may your tree planting be a great success and may it enhance the beauty of your farm. Your Merinos and cattle will certainly be grateful.

## Indigenous trees

Botanical Name	Common name	Height	Flower colour	Evergreen	Feature
Acacia giraffe	Camel thorn	8m	-	Yes	Umbrella shape
Acacia Karoo	Sweet Thorn	6m	Yellow	Semi	Fodder
Acacia robusta	Enkeldoring	7m	Scented	No	Tough
Celtis africana	Camdeboo Stinkwood	15m	White	No	Grey stem
Olea africana	Wild Olive	7m	White	Yes	Small olives
Parkinsonia africana	Green Hair Tree	5m	-	No	Slender
Rhus lancea	Karoo	7m	-	Yes	Tough
Rhus pendulina	Karee willow	6m	-	Yes	Quick growing

## Non-Indigenous

Botanical Name	Common name	Height	Flower colour	Evergreen	Feature
Brachychiton popylneum	Kurrajongs	9m	-	Yes	Bottle trunk
Ceratoniasiliqua	Carob/Judas Tree	8m	-	Yes	Fodder
Cupressus macrocarpa	Monterey Cypress	12m	-	Yes	Grey foliage
Fraxinus velutina	Mexican Ash	9m	-	No	Tough
Gleditsia triacanthos	Honey Locust	15m	-	No	Fodder
Ligustrum lucidum	Glossy Privet	8m	White	Yes	Black berries
Platanus acerifolia	London Plane	12m	-	No	Large leaves
Populus deltoides	Cotton wood	12m	-	No	Quick growing
Prosopis juliflora	Mesquite	9m	Lime-green	Semi	Fodder
Quercus ilex	Holly Oak	9m	-	Yes	Toothed leaves
Schinus molle	Pepper Tree	12m	-	Yes	Small berries
Tamarix plumosa	Spring Tamarist	4m	Pink	No	Tough