

JACARANDA

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Jacaranda mimosifolia D. Don, commonly known as jacaranda, belongs to the family Bignoniaceae. It is a popular ornamental and shade tree in many parts of South Africa (Fig. 1). The administrative capital city of Pretoria is aptly named the Jacaranda City after the many thousands of jacaranda trees which line its streets. This beautiful tree, however, is invasive and poses a potential threat to the indigenous vegetation in the subtropical regions of the country, and in particular the Eastern Transvaal escarpment and Lowveld.

MORPHOLOGY

Jacaranda is a fast-growing tree, 15 to 22 m tall, with a fairly dark green, rounded and spreading crown. The young bark is smooth and pale grey, but with age it becomes rougher and a darker brownish-grey

in colour. The fern-like leaves are oppositely arranged, twice-compound with 12 or more pinnae and measure 200 to 400 mm in length. The leaflets are oblong-rhomboid in shape and measure up to 10 x 2 mm. Inland it is usually deciduous and the leaves turn yellow during late autumn or winter (Fig. 3). The trees are leafless only in early spring.

In late spring and early summer it produces a profusion of showy, usually mauvish-blue, tubular flowers in large clusters at the tips of the branchlets (Fig. 2). Flower colour varies from dark blue through to lilac and white. Where the tree is deciduous, the flowers usually appear earlier than the leaves and consequently show to advantage. The individual flowers measure about 30 mm in length and have an external covering of short, soft, velvety hairs. From them develop flattish, broadly oval, woody capsules with wavy margins (Fig. 2). These

FIG. 1. *Jacaranda* is an ornamental tree of South American origin

FIG. 2. (Inset) *Jacaranda* flowers and capsules at the tip of a branch



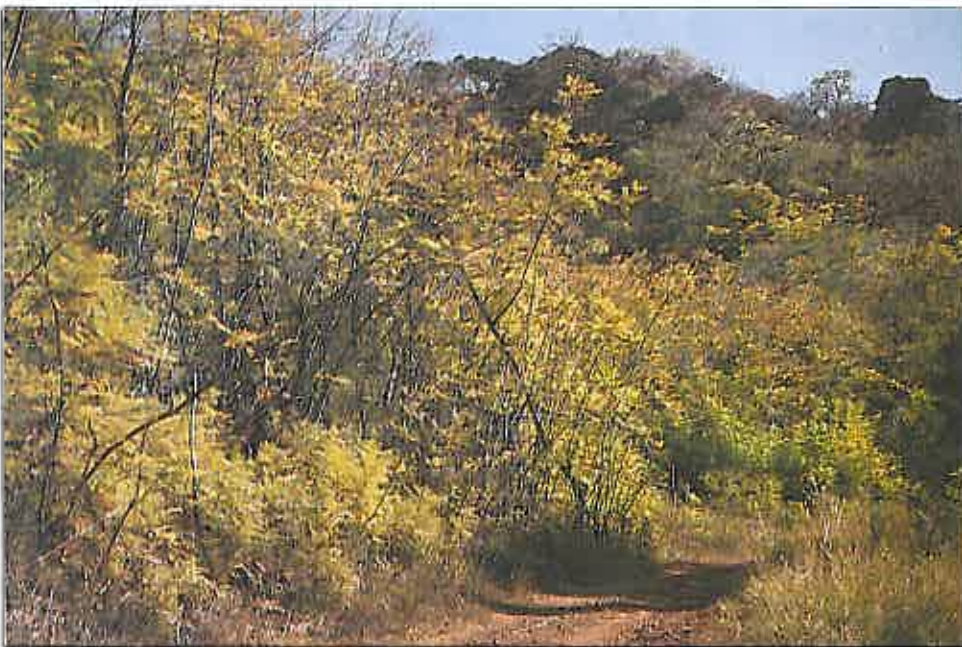


FIG. 3. An infestation of jacaranda in the Eastern Transvaal Lowveld. The leaves have turned yellow

grow to a length of about 60 mm, changing from green to brown and split open after about a year to release numerous flat, winged seeds.

The only tree which the jacaranda may be confused with in South Africa is the indigenous tree wistaria (*Bolusanthus speciosus* (H. Bol.) Harms) belonging to the family Fabaceae (pea family). In spring the tree wistaria, like the jacaranda, bears showy sprays of violet-blue flowers at the tips of its largely leafless branches. The tree wistaria differs from the jacaranda in that it is a smaller, multi-stemmed tree, usually growing to a height of only 5 or 6 m; it has pendulous pale green foliage and a narrower canopy spread. The pea-shaped flowers are followed by small, flat, brownish pods, 60 to 80 mm long.

ORIGIN AND DISTRIBUTION

Jacaranda is indigenous to North-Western Argentina where it occurs mainly on river banks in warmer temperate subhumid conditions. It is one of about 50 species of *Jacaranda* that are indigenous to tropical America.

Two jacaranda trees were imported into South Africa from Brazil in 1888 by Mr J.D. Celliers. They were planted in his garden at Myrtle Lodge, Sunnyside, Pretoria. Large-scale planting of jacarandas began in Pretoria about 10 years after the first two trees were planted. Seed was obtained from many sources, including Australia, Hawaii and various African countries. By 1980 it was estimated that there were over 50 000 jacaranda trees in the streets of Pretoria.

Jacarandas have been planted throughout South Africa except where frost is severe. They are spreading spontaneously (i.e. are naturalised) in the warmer temperate, subtropical and tropical parts of the summer rainfall region, from the Eastern Cape through Natal to the Northern Transvaal. They are invading coastal and inland forests, moist bushveld and woodland, wooded kloofs and riverine woodland. The trees are most prominent along the valleys of the Crocodile and Elands Rivers in the Eastern Transvaal Lowveld and along the Transvaal Drakensberg escarpment.

DANGER

Jacarandas pose a potential threat to the indigenous forest, woodland and riparian communities in the subtropical and tropical regions of South Africa.

LEGISLATION

Jacaranda has been proposed as an invader plant in South Africa, but no legislation has yet been passed against it.

CONTROL

Jacarandas coppice when cut and invade by means of wind-dispersed seed. Seedlings can be hand-pulled when the soil is moist. Saplings should be dug out. To prevent regrowth from coppicing, trees should be ringbarked or cut below ground level.

At the date of publication of this leaflet, no herbicide has been registered against jacaranda.