

# CANCER BUSH (*Lessertia frutescens*)

## PRODUCTION GUIDELINES



**Introduction:** Cancer bush is a hardy, drought-resistant medicinal plant, native to southern Africa. It is used in traditional medicine as an antidiabetic, antistress, antituberculosis agent, and for pain relief, among other

uses. It grows up to 3 meters tall, has red flowers, silvery leaves, balloon-like pods, and a bitter taste due to its flavonoid content.

**Propagation and transplanting:** Cancer bush can be easily propagated through seeds. Seeds can be harvested when the balloon-like pods have dried or turned brown. If harvested too early, the seeds may not be matured and may not germinate. The matured seeds are dark brown to black and approximately 3 mm in diameter.



Germination percentage can reach 80%. Soaking the seeds in water before planting may improve germination percentages. Four weeks after emergence, seedlings can be transplanted in the field with a spacing of 30-100 centimetres between rows and 30 - 50 centimetres between plants.



**Crop management:** Cancer bush grows well throughout the year. It thrives more when it is planted in sandy or sandy-loam soil. When planted in an organic potting medium with compost bark, the plants may experience stunting.



**Water requirements:** Although drought-resistant, cancer bush requires frequent irrigation during the first 4–8 weeks after transplanting. As the plant matures, watering can be reduced to every second day. In extremely hot areas, mulching is recommended to reduce water loss and regulate soil temperature.



**Pests and diseases:** The major pests of cancer bush include black aphids, red spider mites, stem borer, and root-knot nematodes. Nematode analysis and management are important before planting and during plant growth, to avoid severe yield losses.



**Fertilizer:** Three weeks after seed emergence, cancer bush seedlings should be supplemented with multi nutrients. While based on the soil analysis, transplanted cancer bush should be given N:P:K as a base fertilizer, followed by split applications of N. Organic fertiliser may also be used.

**Harvesting and drying:** Cancer bush can be harvested 3–4 months after transplanting using methods such as leaf picking, tip-pruning, or 30 cm heading back pruning. The harvested material can be dried for 4–6 days in ventilated areas (full sun, partial or full shade) or in an oven at 45±5 °C for 1–3 days.

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