



ROOIBOS - A SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE

Just like boerewors, braais, melktert and biltong, Rooibos tea has become part of South Africa's way of life and is considered by many as our national beverage.

Grown exclusively in the Cape Province's Fynbos region, this unique South African plant is recognised across the world for its contribution to a healthy lifestyle, its many health properties, versatility and refreshing taste.

In June 2008 Reader's Digest South Africa celebrated 60 years of publishing in South Africa by featuring 60 reasons for us to remember why South Africa is unique. Reason 7 read, "Best Bush. Rooibos is a uniquely South African tea now exported all over the world". There is no alternative source of supply anywhere in the world. Rooibos' exclusivity of growth in South Africa is a natural heritage that certainly calls for recognition.

In 1999, when the Rooibos brand was under threat by American businesses wanting to trademark the name, the argument was that Rooibos tea is part of the heritage of this country. To protect the Rooibos trademark, the South African Rooibos Council, with the support of the Western Cape's Departments of Agriculture, and Economic Development & Tourism, as well as the University of Pretoria, is working on securing Geographical Indicator (GI) certification so that Rooibos can only be called Rooibos if it comes from the Fynbos region (just like Champagne and Parma ham).

For centuries, Rooibos tea was consumed by locals of the Cederberg region who were the first to have discovered that the needle-like Rooibos leaves can be used to make a refreshing brew that enhanced health. Generations of South Africans have since been aware of the health properties and versatility of Rooibos.

Today, these qualities are also being embraced by a rapidly growing number of loyal Rooibos drinkers internationally. Many varieties of Rooibos teas are available in grocery, specialty and natural food stores throughout the US, Canada, Europe and Japan. The Japanese have shown particular interest in this tea, and have named it "Long Life Tea" because of its anti-ageing properties, and continue to carry out research into its properties and benefits.

In Malaysia, there is a museum that was established in honour of Rooibos. The "Dr Nortier Rooibos Museum", opened in June 2000, is named after Dr Le Fras Nortier, a South African medical doctor who promoted the agricultural potential of Rooibos to the world. The museum showcases the history, production and uses of Rooibos, as well as some of the cultural history of South Africa, especially of the Cape Malays.

Many people in South Africa don't know that Rooibos is unique to our country and even fewer people know that it is actually part of our famous Fynbos kingdom. We as South Africans should be very proud of this special plant of ours and should honour it as a uniquely and proudly South African resource that makes a generous contribution towards our economy. Why not brew a pot of Rooibos to celebrate this Heritage Day?