2016 TREES OF THE YEAR

**Ficus burkei**
*Miq.*
Medium to large tree, up to 18 m high, with leafy, rounded to spreading crown. Exudes milky latex when cut. Main stem thick, often with grooves, growing in soil or on other trees and strangling them. Bark grey, smooth, sometimes with aerial roots. Branchlets smooth or hairy. Leaves spirally arranged or in groups at the same level in branches, held erect, leaflety, elliptic to narrowly oval or oval-shaped and slightly wider above the middle (45-120 x 17-60 mm); right dark green and sub-glossy above, paler below, usually without hairs throughout, rarely finely hairy, leaf tip rounded to pointed, leaf base rounded or narrowing towards leaf stalk which is 7-46 mm long. Fruit round, 10-20 mm broad, usually hairy green; ripening pink or yellowish, sitting on a thick caulerpa-shaped plate, borne singly or in pairs in angle between leaf and stem or just below the leaves, with or without a short stalk (up to 7 mm long). Edible fruits (figs).

**Maerua angolensis**
DC. subspp. angolensis
Small to medium-sized, rounded tree, up to 10 m high. Stem grey. Branches hairless, covered with many small white scabs. Leaves spirally arranged, broadly elliptic to upside down egg-shaped, but wider below the middle (35-70 x 13-42 mm); hairless, soft, drooping; margin smooth; leaf tip rounded, occasionally with a-shaped indentation, ending in small hairlike tip; leaf base broadly tapering to rounded; leaf stalk long, slender, 5-30 mm, swollen and channelled just below leaf. Flowers very attractive, sweetly scented, creamy-white fading to yellow, petals absent; stamens long, prominent; flowering time: July to December. Fruits long drooping pods, 160 mm long, narrow between seeds, appear from September to April; thought to be poisonous.

**Ficus petersii**
*Warb.*
Medium to large tree, up to 20 m high, and 15 m wide with rounded crown. Exudes milky latex when cut. Main stem straight, growing on other plants at first (rarely a rope splitter) or free-standing. Bark pale grey, smooth, becoming darker and tougher with age; young branches often with an orange ring. Branchlets and twiggy greyish and finely hairy. Leaves spirally arranged in groups towards the ends of the branches, elongated and wider above the middle to upside down egg-shaped (40-80 x 15-28 mm); green to greyish green, hairy when fully grown; leaf tip rounded to shortly pointed, leaf base narrowing towards leaf stalk, leaf stalk long and slender, 30-50 mm long, without hairs, grooved above. Fruits round, slightly hairy to hairless, yellow-green or greenish when ripe, without a stalk or shortly stalked, borne typically on bare branches in dense groups.

**Maerua caffra**
*DC.* Pax
Shrub or small tree, up to 10 m high. Main stem <250 mm in diameter, bark white and mottled, freshly cut wood smells unpleasant, roots thick and tuberous. Young branches covered with small white spots. Leaves spirally arranged, stalk long (15-60 mm), leaf blade compound, usually with 3 leaflets; occasionally 5 leaflets. Elliptic to upside down egg-shaped but wider below middle (20-75 x 6-25 mm long); terminal leaflet longer than others; leaflet hairy, hairless margins smooth, tip of each leaflet narrowed to rounded with fine hair-like tip, base of each leaflet narrowed, deciduous with short stalks, 1-5 mm long. Flowers attractive, scented, borne in groups, petals absent, with tufts of spreading stamens flowering late. August to October. Fruits round, smooth or covered with very small bumps; green with dark green vertical lines, hanging on stout stalks, appear from October to December.

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2016 TREES OF THE YEAR

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Maerua angolensis
DC. subsp. angolensis

Maerua caffra (DC.) Pax

The Ficus burkii (Miq.) Miq.

Ficus petetersii Warb.

National tree number: 116. Family: Moraceae
Common names: burkii fig, eastern fig, plano-ribbed fig
Scoparia, green wood fig, wilgfig, wen fig, wenfig, kwe-like fig, kwefig, wambe (Ndebele), mathe (Xhosa), umuthi (Zulu), umkhola (Zulu), umzimbe (isiXhosa), umxoki (isiZulu), umxoki (isiZulu), umxoki (isiZulu)

General appearance: A deciduous, spreading tree, usually with some semi-deciduous, bare branches, which are not leafy. Fruits are yellow green, orange or reddish brown, subglobose to ovoid, 6–11 cm in diameter, with a thick, waxy, leathery skin. Fruits are eaten raw or cooked, or used for making jams and preserves. The wood is used for furniture, flooring and fencing.

Distribution and habitat: Occurs in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. A common tree in areas of high rainfall, often in seasonally dry regions where it grows in the drier coastal regions or on stony ground. It is a fast grower and can reach a height of 20 m in 10 years. The wood is used for making furniture, flooring and fencing. Fruits are eaten raw or cooked, or used for making jams and preserves. The wood is used for furniture, flooring and fencing.

Meaning of name: Ficus - Latin name for fig; burkii - named after Dr. Burk (1857–1930), South African botanist who collected many of the plants from the eastern Transvaal. Petetersii - named after Dr. Peter Peters, a South African botanist who collected many of the plants from the eastern Transvaal.

According to the official list for trees of the year, which was developed several years ago by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, the 2016 common tree of the year is Ficus thorntoni. However, recent phylogenetic evidence suggests that several distinct Ficus species are classified as F. thorntoni. The F. thorntoni was described from Ghana and is restricted to West Africa. The southern African species, F. burkii and F. petetersii, previously synonymized under F. thorntoni, are regarded as good species and are therefore listed as the 2016 trees of the year.

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