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Aloe thompsoniae

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Aloe thompsoniae Groenew.

Family: Asphodelaceae

Common names: Wolkberg cliff aloe (Eng.), Wolkberg kransaalwyn (Afr.).

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Aloe thompsoniae is an attractive dwarf aloe with dense rosettes of soft green leaves and orange-red flowers, which thrives in hanging baskets and containers.



Description

Plants fast-growing, stemless, (or stems very short) with small dense rosettes, proliferating from the base from underground (subterranean) stolons to form small dense clusters up to 200 mm in diameter with soft recurved leaves. Stem ascending, horizontal, sometimes pendulous on shady cliff faces. The leaves are linear, softly succulent, channelled, green, and mottled towards the base, ascending and becoming recurved at the tip (apex), 50-200 mm long and 5-15 mm broad. leaf margin is beset with very small teeth (denticulate).



The inflorescence is an ascending raceme 200-300 mm long bearing up to 5 pale pink sterile bracts clasping the stem. The 12-16 flowers are grouped together at the end in a head (capitate). They are drooping (sub-pendulous), orange-green-tipped, 27-30 mm long and 6-7 mm in diameter, on pedicels to 15-20 mm long.

Conservation Status

Rare. Although *Aloe thompsoniae* has a limited distribution and is confined to the Wolkberg it is common in its habitat and not threatened. Plants often grow on inaccessible precipices and are thus well protected and out of reach.



Distribution and habitat

Aloe thompsoniae grows on mineral-poor quartzitic soil in sandstone rock crevices and is endemic to the Wolkberg r Polokwane (Limpopo Province). It is confined to the moist and well-watered sheer cliff faces and crevices in large bot at an altitude of 1650-2100 m above sea level. Plants are often locally abundant. They grow mainly on shady, east- ar south-facing aspects. Plants also grow on the summit and on boulders and are not restricted to cliffs. The temperatur moderate during summer, with frequent fog, and winters are dry and cool. The rainfall is about 1500-2000 mm per ar Plants grow in Northern Escarpment Quartzite Sourveld of the Grassland Biome (Mucina *et al.* 2005). Associated pl its habitat include *Crassula pellucida* subsp. *alsinoides*, *C. setulosa*, *Bulbine natalensis*, [Aloe arborescens](#), *Drimia rob* [Merwillia plumbea](#) and *Cyrtanthus junodii*.

Derivation of name and historical aspects

Aloe thompsoniae is named in honour of Audrey Thompson the daughter of Sheila Thompson (fl. 1970), a grower of indigenous plants at Magoebaskloof who first collected the plant. It was named by Mr H.B. Groenewald in 1936 in the Afrikaans journal "Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns" (Vol. 14: 64).

Ecology

Aloe thompsoniae flowers during summer (November-April) and sporadically at other times. It is pollinated mainly by sunbirds. The capsules ripen during autumn and the seeds are dispersed by the wind. It is related to [A. nubigena](#), wh can be distinguished at a glance by its leaves which are arranged in opposite rows (distichous) and have an entire m



Growing Aloe thompsoniae

Best grown in cool Afro-alpine or summer-rainfall grassland gardens in a slightly acid peat and sand mixture. Feed re during spring and summer. It is easily grown in a greenhouse in cool shady conditions. Keep moist and cool during the summer months.

Plants grow prolifically from the base and soon form clusters. They can be propagated by division or from offsets or sc Sow during spring or summer. Germination is within 3 weeks and seedlings grow fast and plants should flower in the second or third year.

References

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- Mucina, L. & Rutherford, M. C. (Eds.) 2006. The vegetation of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. Strelitzia 19. So African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria.
- Reynolds, G.W. 1974. The Aloes of South Africa. A.A. Balkema, Cape Town, Rotterdam.
- Van Wyk, B.E. & Smith, G.F. 1994. Guide to the Aloes of South Africa. Briza Publications, Pretoria.

Ernst van Jaarsveld

Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden

May 2009

Plant Attributes:

Plant Type: Succulent

SA Distribution: Limpopo

Soil type: Sandy

Flowering season: Early Summer, Late Summer

PH: Acid, Neutral

Flower colour: Orange

Aspect: Full Sun, Morning Sun (Semi Shade), Afternoon Sun (Semi Shade)

Gardening skill: Easy

Special Features:

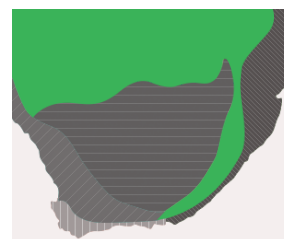


Attracts birds



Good potplant

Horticultural zones



Zone 5 Bushveld summer rainfall, Light frost

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