


Story by Laura Cooke, with credit to the SA Rooibos Council, Pix © Trevor Christians, Red Espresso

Rooibos REMEDY

Discover the benefits of a simple cup of tea



South African moms have been dosing their kids with Rooibos tea for sore tummies, colds and flu, and sleeplessness for generations. Since the 1960s, the science that explains 'why' exactly this plant is so good has been building up to form a formidable body of evidence.

STORM

LONDON

The many tales of Rooibos' soothing, anti-aging and healing abilities fascinated scientists and researchers, both locally and abroad, and lead to numerous scientific studies demonstrating that our oldwives' remedy holds water.

According to Mientjie Mouton, director of the SA Rooibos Council's product research portfolio, "While there is a convincing body of anecdotal evidence about the health benefits of Rooibos, our industry is committed to investing in world class research in order to verify where and how Rooibos is most effective, and how people can benefit from this unique South African beverage."

One of the exciting fields currently being explored is Rooibos' cancer-fighting properties. Professor Wentzel Gelderblom from the Medical Research Council says, "We are only beginning to uncover the chemo-preventive properties of the unique South African herbal teas. Although complex, it is an enticing research challenge for the future."

In addition, Rooibos can be a treatment for stomach cramps and diarrhoea, is recommended as a treatment for respiratory and liver disease and to lower blood pressure, boosts your immune system and can help to fight allergies.

While scientists do not yet have all the answers about exactly how Rooibos helps the body to stay younger and fight disease, they know that it has something to do with its potent and unique blend of antioxidants that are able to influence processes in living cells. One of its most active antioxidants – aspalathin – is found only in Rooibos and nowhere else in the plant kingdom.

In 2007, a research team at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology headed by Jeanine Marnewick began the first clinical Rooibos studies in adults who are at risk of developing heart disease. The preliminary results are out, and while they still need to undergo international peer review and appraisals, Marnewick says, "Our results show a significant improvement – and therefore decreased risk of heart disease – in the study-participants who drank six cups of Rooibos per day."

"Looking at specific blood markers, we found that Rooibos probably decreases oxidative damage by slowing down atherosclerosis, or the hardening of arteries," Dr Marnewick explains. On top of this, Rooibos also increased the levels of the body's own 'super antioxidant' called



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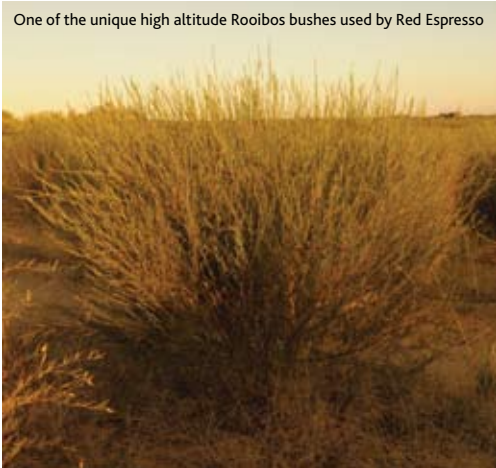
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One of the unique high altitude Rooibos bushes used by Red Espresso



glutathione and helped to reduce the levels of 'bad' LDL-cholesterol significantly.

And it is not just drinking Rooibos that is good for one.

Adding a few teabags to your bath can soothe sunburnt skin, while rinsing your hair with Rooibos tea will add a lovely shine. Many cosmetics companies have caught on to the supposed anti-aging benefit of Rooibos and one can find a wide range of soaps, scrubs, creams and bath products making use of Rooibos as a key ingredient. In the garden, leftover tea leaves make for great plant food, while your own meals can be enhanced with Rooibos in place of water. Dissolve your stock in Rooibos rather than water for some extra zing in stews and soups or use Rooibos as a natural meat tenderiser in your marinade.

Yet another innovative application of the 'red bush' is an alternative to your morning coffee in the form of a Red Espresso, created by South African Carl Pretorius in 2005. Pretorius is quoted, "Red Espresso offers a healthy alternative to coffee without compromising on taste or style and satisfies my need for an authentic espresso experience." Created using the same process as regular espresso, the popularity of the drink (in the form of espressos, cappuccinos and lattés) has spread across the globe. In 2008, Red Espresso was named one of the top ten Tea Products at the World Tea Expo in Las Vegas, and walked away with the *Best New Product* award in the Specialty Beverage Category at the Specialty Coffee Association of America's coffee show – the largest show of its kind.

Grown in very specific conditions, Rooibos only appears in the greater Cedarberg area of the northwestern Cape and is farmed over an area of about 40,000 hectares producing an average of 20,000 tons of Rooibos each year.

The Rooibos Council of South Africa is acutely aware

of the importance of considering the environmental impact of the farming methods utilised as well as the social responsibilities of the industry. They have embarked on a sustainability project to ensure that Rooibos production will provide financial benefits to all stakeholders, without compromising the environment and future generations' ability to benefit from Rooibos. Rooibos is uniquely South African in that it grows only in a limited geographical area in the Cape Floristic Kingdom, which is an international 'Biodiversity Hotspot'. The Rooibos industry as a whole therefore wants to be associated with responsible and sustainable practices in the special area that Rooibos is produced. So far, 40 farmers are in the process of implementing the guidelines for sustainable production of Rooibos. The ultimate goal is for all Rooibos farmers and other role players to comply with the sustainability criteria that have been developed for the industry.

There is far more to a simple cup of Rooibos than one would first imagine. And it seems that our moms were right all along. This winter, heed their advice, and the advice of numerous scientists and researchers, and treat yourself to a tasty, immune boosting, anti-aging cup of good old Rooibos tea. 🍵

EXPORT FACTS

- More than 7,000 tons of Rooibos are exported each year, compared to less than 1,850 tons in 1999.
- Rooibos is exported to more than 30 countries, of which Germany, the UK, Netherlands, Japan and US are the biggest markets.
- South Africans are the biggest consumers and Rooibos lovers and consume around 5,000 tons each year.