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Agathosma betulina

[Synonyms : *Barosma betulina*, *Diosma betulina*, *Hartogia betulina*]

BUCHU is an evergreen shrub. Native to Cape Province in South Africa it has scented whitish to pink flowers.

It is also known as Bookoo, Bucco (English, German), Bucku, *Bukko* (Finnish, German), *Bukkostrauch* (German), *Diosma* (Italian), *Diosme* (French), *Diozma* (Turkish), *Götterduft* (German), Mountain buchu, Round buchu, and Round leaf buchu; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of uselessness.

Warning – buchu should not be taken internally when suffering from kidney disorders.

Buchu is a protected species in South Africa.

Betulina is derived from the genus name *Betula* meaning ‘birch-like’.

Leaves of this species (which have conspicuous oil glands on their edges) together with those of long (*Agathosma crenulata*) and short buchu are all gathered for distillation to produce a volatile greenish oil. Of the three plants however buchu is the most prized.

The colonists of the Cape of Good Hope learnt of the plant’s qualities from the native Hottentots and local tribesmen still use it today. Native South Africans mix the leaves with oil for a body perfume.

The leaves are also used to flavour an infusion of black currant and brandy (Buchu brandy).

Although until the introduction of relatively recent legislation most of the leaf harvest had provided an export crop as a cordial flavouring in the United States.

The buchu plant was introduced to England in 1790 and can be seen growing in Kew Gardens now.

Medicinally, in South Africa Buchu brandy was used as a tonic. In Britain buchu provides a remedy for cystitis, fluid retention and other disorders.