



Fairly Traded • Sustainable • Reliable • Renewable

## **MARULA – It's not just for beer!**

The delicious taste of marula fruit reflects its origins as the "food of kings." The history of the marula tree itself goes back thousands of years. Archaeological evidence shows the tree was a source of nutrition as far back as 10,000 years B.C. In the Pomongwe Cave in Zimbabwe, 24 million marula fruits are estimated to have been eaten.

Legends abound on the multiple uses of the tree, the bark, the leaves, fruit, nut and kernels. Marula was a dietary mainstay in South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Namibia throughout ancient times. But beyond its food value, according to Venda culture, bark infusions from the marula tree can determine the sex of an unborn child. (A child of the opposite sex is considered extra special as it disobeyed the spirits, possibly a prequel to his/her teenage years!)

The Marula tree bears small round shaped fruit, green in color that ripens to yellow, that is harvested off the ground from January to March. The fruit is picked off the ground when ripe, by villagers, mostly women, in Southern Africa. One marula tree can produce up to 500kg of fruit a year. Not too shabby for one tree!

Marula fruit is described as tart, sweet and refreshing, with a "guava-like" taste and anything from "tropical" to "revitalizing" to "pleasant" or "sour-sweet." The fruit pulp contains four to eight times more Vitamin C than oranges and makes an excellent base for fruit soft drinks, nectars and teas; alcoholic beverages such as brandies, liqueurs (the famous and excellent Amarula cream liquor), brew (the legendary and ageless marula "beer" that has spawned festivals), wines, and punches. The cooked fruit can be transformed into tasty jams, juices, jelly, and snacks. Even though this fruit is seasonal, it can be processed into pulp in large volumes and stored frozen for over a year.

The marula seeds, or nuts, are located inside an extremely hard, walnut-sized stone surrounded by the marula flesh. The nuts contain high levels of protein and minerals, e.g., iron, phosphorous, copper, magnesium and zinc, so they are an excellent food source. They have a very delicate and distinct aroma and a very high oil content. The oil, once extracted, is used for cooking, as a salad dressing, and – more commonly with its high percentage of oleic acid and other antioxidants – an outstanding ingredient in cosmetics and skin/hair formulations.

The fruit peel may have more than twenty-seven different kinds of flavors for ice cream, yogurt, and other foods, and at least ten volatile esters that could be extracted for aromatherapy, homeopathic medicines, and essential oils.

Marula... the fruit for all seasons and many reasons – beyond beer!