

## STAR NURSERY

# Big trees for Africa

At the large-tree nursery Trees SA between Stellenbosch and Somerset West, more than a hundred varieties of tree species are on offer – and they're all irresistible. Some are as high as 15m!

It's not possible to walk through Trees SA's nursery and choose a tree in a hurry. There are rows and rows of magnificent trees here, each one as exceptional as the next, boasting a unique crown or leaves or bark.

"We have more than 100 varieties," says owner Dag Willems. "And we don't only keep the popular species – I love trees far too much to take that approach. I can't resist a beautiful tree."

Dag was the regional manager of indigenous forests for the Western Cape Department of Forestry until 1999 and then decided to start his own tree-related enterprise. In 2004, he chose to focus on the growing, "rescuing" and transport



of large trees. "In those days there was no professional service offering this in South Africa. There were a few cowboys who moved trees, but their methods gave the business a bad name and it took some time to restore the image of this line of work."

In 2003, Dag visited nurseries in Europe to get some ideas and, on his return, planted his first trees in large sugar bags. He also became involved in designing and making much of the equipment needed for transporting trees. A little over 12 years later, Trees SA has five nurseries (four in the Cape and one in Sedgefield) with approximately 60 000 trees in stock.



Dag Willems, dwarfed by the fever trees at his Stellenbosch nursery. **ABOVE** It takes up to five men and special equipment to move a tree of this size.

The smallest trees come in 250-litre bags. It takes five strong men to move them by hand. The other sizes, up to and including the 4 500-litre sacks, require special equipment. "We have a 95% success rate when it comes to replanting – for me, success is a tree with a full crown that is able to function independently."

As for the success of the business, Dag attributes it to the fact that Trees SA has its own equipment, truck-mounted cranes, installation team and aftercare service. "Our team takes satisfaction in the installation of the tree. A customer doesn't just drive out of here with a tree on the back of their bakkie, never to be seen again. There's nothing as satisfying as seeing how a large tree can transform an ordinary garden into a characterful home instantaneously."

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## How to choose a tree for your garden

When choosing a tree for your garden, consider the soil type, wind direction and microclimate, says Dag. Equally important: ask yourself what you want the tree to do for you: Do you want to plant it for privacy or shade, or do you want your children to play under it?

"Established trees add an incredible amount of value to a house. You are actually buying time when you invest in a big tree – in truth, it is growing capital."

When moving a tree yourself, the most important thing is to make sure the root ball is disturbed as little as possible, from the time you remove the tree to the time you replant it. It's also crucial that the tree is given enough water until it can continue independently. This can take up to five years in the case of large trees.

"Corals, wild plums and white stinkwood are easy to replant, while fever trees and silver birches don't like being moved at all," advises Dag.

The oldest tree "rescued" and re-established successfully by Trees SA is an 80-year-old Californian redwood. Last September they shipped 53 trees, averaging about 7m in height (each with a 3m crown), to Dubai. Dag says it has also happened that they had to move a tree four times!

His favourite is the 30-year-old swamp cypress that was 15m high and weighed eight tonnes when it was planted at the entrance to Tokara wine farm. "It was incredible to see the difference it made to the atmosphere. There's nothing as beautiful as the right tree in the right place."

Then there is the 60-year-old white stinkwood that they recently sold for R120 000. "It has a unique trunk," says Dag. "It was difficult to persuade me to sell it."

Dag says he's loved trees ever since he can remember. "What makes me most proud is that we have turned trees into good travellers." >

### Pop in

Trees SA may be a wholesale nursery but anyone is welcome to visit and buy a tree. "Choosing a tree is a personal thing," says Dag. "People like to pick their own one themselves."

**Where?** On Vlaeberg Road between Somerset West and Stellenbosch

**Times** 07:30-16:45 (Mondays to Fridays); 08:30-12:30 (Saturdays)

**Contact** trees-sa.co.za ☎ 021 842 0003