**Bulbine frutescens**

Fam. Asphodelaceae  
Afrikaans: balsemkopiva, copaiba, geelkatstert,  
katstert  
English: snake flower, cat’s tail, burn jelly plant,  
stalked bulbine, grass aloe  
Sotho: Khomo-ya-Ntsukammele, sehlaresa-pekane,  
sehlaresa-mollo  
Tswana: Ibhucu  
Xhosa: intelezi, ingelwane  
Zulu: ibhucu, ithethe elimpofu

There are over 50 species of bulbine, and many are  
used by our traditional herbalists including *B.  
asphodeloides* (wildekopiva), *B. alooides* (rooistorm),  
*B. narcissifolia* (geelslangkop), *B. natalensis*  
(rooiwortel), and *B. latifolia*.

**Distribution**  
*Bulbine frutescens* is indigenous to large parts of  
South Africa, and it thrives in the Cape, where it  
is a common garden plant.

**Description**  
*Bulbine frutescens* is an aloe-like succulent plant  
with a rosette of long, fleshy, yellow-green  
leaves. Long flower stems bear elongated  
clusters of small, yellow-orange flowers with  
characteristically fluffy stamens.

**Parts used**  
The fresh leaves, slimy leaf gel (less commonly  
roots).

**Availability**  
Widely available. Most nurseries and garden  
centres stock plants, seeds are available from  
seed suppliers.

**Value**  
*B. asphodeloides*, *B. natalensis* (rooiwortel), and  
*B. latifolia* are wild-harvested and sold on  
markets. *Bulbine frutescens* is a popular with  
gardeners as a groundcover. Loved by bees.

**Constituents**  
The stems and roots contain knipholone-type  
anthraquinones, topical healing effect likely due  
to glycoproteins (aloctin A and B, also found in  
*Aloe arborescens*).

**Actions**  
*Bulbine frutescens* is mainly employed as a  
vulnerary. It also has antibacterial properties.

**Therapeutic Uses**  
*Bulbine frutescens* is one of nature’s  
extraordinary medicinal plants, a first-aid  
pharmacy in one. Useful externally for a wide  
variety of skin conditions including cuts, grazes,  
acne, burns, blisters, cold sores, cracked lips,  
insect bites, sunburn, rashes and ringworm.  
Internally for coughs, colds and arthritis and  
‘insanity’.

**Wise-use Guidelines**  
Safe used externally, check for allergic  
reactions. Use with caution internally.

**Preparations and Dosage**  
External:  
- fresh leaf sap - applied directly to the  
skin  
- poultice – warmed and applied directly  

Internal:  
- an infusion of a few fresh leaves in  
boiling water is taken two or three times  
a day.

**Bulbine Growing Tips**  
**Positioning and Soil**  
*Bulbine frutescens* likes full sun and can thrive  
with very little water. Resistant to drought, heat  
and frost and can be grown easily anywhere,  
including a windowsill or a pot on the balcony. It  
thrives in almost any soil, even where little else  
grows. Space plants 20-30cm apart.

**Propagation**  
Best done in Spring. Easy from seed or from  
cuttings and division of clumps. Any piece with a  
bit of stem will root quickly.

**Cultivation**  
*Bulbine frutescens* will thrive with a little  
compost and a watering once a week or so. Will  
flower almost year round attracting an  
abundance of bees. Does well and looks good in  
medium to large pots. Will cascade over edges.  
May need some pruning to keep tidy.

**Harvesting and Preserving**  
Simply cut off a piece whenever needed. As it is  
best used fresh, don’t try to dry it for storage.  
Leaves can be used to make an alcohol tincture.