

# The Aloe that turns its head

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*Tilt-head Aloe; Slaphoringaalwyn; Ikhala (Xhosa)*

## A living compass

Can you see that this aloe's 'head' of leaves is tilted to one side? It tilts in the direction from which it receives the most light. Here in the southern hemisphere, the most sun comes from the north good to know if ever you are lost! But, a plant growing in a shady spot will tilt its head in the direction that it receives the most light, not necessarily the south. So, before using one of these aloes for navigation, make sure it's growing in full sun!

## Pink dye

Tilt-head Aloe leaves can be used to dye fabric a delicate pink colour, without the use of mordants – substances that set the dye on fabric.

## From the Eastern Cape

The Tilt-head Aloe grows wild from Montagu in the Western Cape to the Kei River in the Eastern Cape. The best place to see them is between Uitenhage and Jansenville. They grow on slopes and in valleys in the Albany Thicket Biome, where summers are hot, and winters are mild, and rain falls in both summer and winter.

## Handsome

The Tilt-head Aloe's botanical name *speciosa* means beautiful, handsome or showy in Latin – a name well-earned. This 3 – 6 m tall, single-stemmed aloe has elegant, pale blue-green leaves that are often tinged pink at the tips and edges, and are armed with small pink teeth. The large, densely packed, multi-coloured flower-heads look as if they are inside the rosette of leaves because they are carried on a very short stalk. The flowers are red when in bud, and, as they open they turn green with white stripes. The stamens that stick out of the open flowers are dark orange. Although each flower-head is solitary, one plant can produce up to four flower-heads in a season

## Flowers rich in nectar

The nectar- and pollen-rich flowers attract bees, butterflies, and birds, particularly sunbirds.

## Easy and rewarding to grow

The Tilt-head Aloe is one of the most beautiful aloes and does well in the garden. It needs a sunny position and well-drained soil. It tolerates a wide range of soils but does best in fertile, loamy soil. Water well to get it established after which it will look after itself. This aloe is ideal for the water wise garden but is not suited to very cold areas and needs protection from frost.