

***Myrtus nivellei* Batt & Trab.**
Myrtaceae



Compiled by Dr. Salima Benhouhou

■ **Morphological description**

A tall evergreen shrub, with a rough bark, frequently up to 150 cm. high in good shady sites.

The dark green, opposite, lanceolated, sessile leaves give off a pleasantly fragrant essential oil. The flower parts are in multiples of five, with an amazingly large number of stamens. Petals are usually white.

The fruit is a small globose blue-black berry 1 cm. in diameter. The flowers are pollinated by insects, and the seeds dispersed by the birds that feed on the berries.

There is no particular flowering period since the plant has been seen in flower at different times during the year.

■ **Geographical distribution**

Local: Common in the Hoggar and Tassili mountains.

Regional: Algeria and Tchad (Tibesti).

Global: The Saharan myrtle is endemic of the mountains of the central Sahara.

■ **Ecology**

The plant occurs in small areas of sparse relict woodland and is found in wadis above 1000 m, on gravelly soil and in rocky sites. Rainfall values for this shrub vary between 50 and 100 mm. per year.

■ **Status**

According to the IUCN criteria this endemic species falls into the "EN" category and is listed as an endangered species. Despite being on the list of species protected under Algerian law, the threat to

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Myrtus: from the Greek myrtos, shrub; *nivellei*: according to a French army officer, Nivelles

Targui: tefeltest

English: Saharan myrtle

French: myrte du Sahara

this plant from human collection is severe, since it is a medicinal plant much appreciated by the Tuareg. The plant is on the floristic list of biosphere reserve (Tassili), terrestrial ecoregion (Tibesti in Libya) and national parks in both the Hoggar and the Tassili. Measures should be taken for its propagation in nurseries.

■ **Part used**

The leaves are collected throughout the year, prepared as a decoction, and taken by mouth.

■ **Constituent**

No data available in the literature on its constituents.

■ **Pharmacological action and toxicity**

No data available in the literature on the pharmacological action and toxicity of this plant.

■ **Pharmacopeias**

Not relevant for this species.

■ **Pharmaceutical products**

Not relevant for this species.

■ **Traditional medicine and local knowledge**

It is used for liver problems. In the Tassili region, the usual use is a decoction of a handful of leaves mixed with goat's milk and heated on charcoal.

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