

Mother Nature's Gift:

THE HEMP

Cupboard. Pantry. Car. Lounge.

Ceiling. There is literally no single

area of your life where hemp isn't

quite at home. After all, a plant

with 25 000 different uses is, well,

versatile – to say the least.

What's even more astonishing than the breadth of hemp's diversity is the fact that those 25 000 uses were recorded by *Popular Mechanics* back in 1938. Imagine just how many more could be unlocked using today's technology.

What grants this plant supercrop status is the fact that every single part, from outer bast (the equivalent of bark) to inner fibres can be put to use – which means that nothing is wasted, observes John Vermeulen, who is concluding a Masters Degree on hemp as an eco-design material for Industrial Design at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

That, in itself is impressive, but then there are hemp's other attributes: its versatility makes it an outstanding substitute for trees that would otherwise be used to produce timber, pulp and paper, according to Ernest Small and David Marcus, authors of *Hemp: A New Crop with New Uses for North America*. As a weed, the plant grows exceptionally quickly (it can be harvested after a scant four to six months), making its