

FMR March 6, 2021

Here we are, the month of March which is important to many both historically and spiritually.

The official start of our autumn is around the middle of the month and lasts until the middle of June, followed by our three months of real winter.

It is also, for many cultures, the beginning of the New Year and it might be a good idea to treat it as such by initiating innovative ideas in the garden.

For starters it is the time to plan for winter flowers and vegetables.

If you don't do seed sowing, then you will probably have a short wait before a full range of seedlings become available.

Many veg seeds are large and easy to handle like peas, spinach (an all year rounder) and broad beans which can be sown directly into the soil.

Cabbage, broccoli, brussels sprouts and onions are best sown into trays and planted out later.

Many of us find seedlings the easy route to success but no matter what you prefer, soil preparation is a must in the weeks ahead.

Get that compost into the ground as soon as possible to start good microbial activity and you will see instant results immediately after planting in the weeks ahead.

Autumn is a good time to take many hardwood cuttings so single out those plants which are special or difficult to find commercially.

The nursery can advise you on different techniques, what propagation mix to use, rooting powders and best watering practice.

Propagation is a lot of fun both from seed or cuttings and anyone can do it.

March onwards is an exciting time when many local plants are in flower or getting ready to flower so you will find a large selection in the nursery.

It is our planting time no matter what time of the year they flower.

The big advantage is that they will benefit from the coming rain and establish themselves before next summer when conditions become more challenging.

Be it the protea family or any other local species, get them in soon and water regularly, so their roots are sufficiently established to cope with the forthcoming rain.

If you plant in cold, wet and soggy conditions the success rate will drop.

It is also a good time to get moving on any tree planting exercise.

Our local evergreens like Milkwoods, Wild Camphor, Ironwood and Wild Peach are very successful and take off quickly but this can be said of all other large trees be they evergreen or deciduous, exotic or indigenous.

If you are looking for an unusual medium sized evergreen tree, then I would recommend the Bird berry... *Psychotria capensis*.

It is a native of the eastern side of the country, stretching from the Eastern Cape to KwaZulu Natal and inland to the Eastern Lowveld.

It nevertheless does very well here, and good specimens can be seen in Kirstenbosch.

It has several amazing features, starting with the golden yellow flowers in summer, followed by the small berry which starts off yellow and matures to red and black in late summer, autumn.

All of this shows up against a mass of light green shiny leaves.

For me it is a great bird magnet, attracting a wide range of feathered personalities which includes the comical Bulbul, scheming Mousebirds, raucous Starlings, Robins, Barbets and energized White eyes!!

The Birdberry is an asset in any garden.

Its easy to grow, thrives in sun and semi shade with regular water in the hot summer months.

They prefer well composted deep soils and it goes without saying that a good layer of mulch will keep it happy.

They usually grow not more than about 5m in height and therefore ideal for the smaller gardens but also suitable as a functional understory in well treed gardens.

I have seen them grown as hedge plants and perfect pot specimens as well.

If you want the fragrance of honey in the garden from mid-winter onwards then you will have to get the Honey Daisy, *Euryops virgineus*, into the ground sooner than later.

Give them lots of sun and prune back after flowering to keep them leafy.

Good news! Landscape Architect Hank Lith will be leading a tour of the Arderne Gardens this morning at 10am. There are exciting things happening in the garden, not least that one of the old Campion trees has fallen into the pond. Its all very safe and no crocodiles have been spotted!

There is a small fee of R40 which buys a lot of fun and information!1

Meet at the entrance gate on Main Rd , Claremont @10am today.

That's it for this week and look forward to chatting again soon.