

March 13

You have heard the old saying...all gardeners know better until they must ask another gardener!!

Quite true! There are so many ways to do things relating to gardening and in the end most of them work.

Anyone who knows better than the rest, has not tried all the other ways... so don't be shy to try!!

Water will always be scarce, so we need a plan in place to make sure our gardens have a bright future.

This will only happen if we step away from traditional gardening and move toward that which is more in line with nature, under our local conditions.

Right now, it is a great to be outdoors with perfect weather after all that hectic wind which did nevertheless bring us a dash of rain.

Right now I am enjoying the delicious seasonal fruit on offer, which includes the Num Num fruit, prickly pears and the yellow cling peaches which are in abundance. All so easy to grow!

Besides all the suitable plants we can introduce, what about improving our other outdoor living spaces.

Furniture, funky shade structures, a gravel or sandy area for a round of boule or maybe some jukskei for entertainment around the braai.

You could just go for the traditional horseshoe pitch, requiring not much more than two pins and 8 old horseshoes

Outdoor chessboards are always fun, combining gravel, pavers and recycled material as board characters.

These can include recycled plastic bottles filled with sand in all shapes, colours and sizes, also tins or homemade wooden pieces....

Outdoor showers that direct water into the garden are practical and an interesting feature in the small suburban garden.

A bird bath in a quiet secluded spot with the addition of a comfy garden chair is all you need to enjoy nature's energy!!

Gardens should not be ornaments but rather practical working spaces that complement the environment and fit into our natural surroundings.

We need to make our gardens a part of everyday living!!

Many homeowners and garden designers are looking at xeriscaped gardens for ideas...many found in California, Australia, Mexico and other Mediterranean countries.

Creating a Mediterranean garden requires a little common sense and a lot of suitable plants.

Drought tolerant gardens are not just filled with succulents, cacti and harsh looking plants.

They can include trees, flowering shrubs and groundcovers, herbs and vegetables, all you need are the right plants for your locality and climate.

An attractive and practical feature in any garden is a dry river bed made of rock, stone, groundcover, some old logs or driftwood and a few hardy local trees to create shade and calm. It can also act as a drain or collection point. You don't need a big garden to achieve this, just a new attitude!!

Literature and information on the subject is plentiful and the garden centre is filled with the perfect plant material.

Compared to a few years ago, the interest in succulents and local waterwise plants has increased tremendously.

I think we should be careful when choosing plants even certain indigenous plants, many of which are not waterwise or suited to our conditions.

Take *Acacia xanthophloea* now *Vachellia xanthophloea*, the Fever Acacia.

Its very sought after for its yellow green bark and fast growth habit.

It does well in protected areas and requires fairly regular water to stay healthy but it is certainly not the best tree if you have a very exposed garden with minimal water.

It is a summer rainfall species from warm lowveld conditions and I have seen many broken in two by strong wind in the city.

A great tree, but I suggest that you look at all the local alternatives, their natural distribution and requirements before selecting the one for you!

We know its autumn when we see the March Lily or Belladonna Lily coming out to play on the verges, in many parks and in the wild.

To me they are the perfect example of a true succulent.

They sleep in the hot dry months and flower in Autumn so that their seeds are ready to settle in when the winter rains fall.

Every year they are nothing short of a great surprise to all of us.

The leaves emerge after flowering when moisture is guaranteed!

Old clumps can be divided up and planted in the most difficult positions.

The trick is not to plant them too deep, making sure the top portion is just above ground level.

The flowers are scented and as we all know they can be around for many weeks should cool conditions prevail.

I am amazed that these beautiful, easy to grow locals are not more readily available in nurseries. More demand will create a greater supply!

Its time to get out there and enjoy the magical Autumn splendour and seasonal changes. Its Goodbye and see you next week.