

MARCH 20

Winter is on the way, but we can look at some of the forthcoming attractions. Autumn is the curtain raiser with much fruit, flowers and foliage so don't give up and think all has past!

Lucky are those who have members of the *Plectranthus* family which are about to flower if not already in flower!!

They have come a long way from the old 'stoep plants' Granny was so fond of. So many, so varied, so beautiful, with some flowering all year round.

*Plectranthus* come in all forms and sizes, ranging from tight knit ground covers to small sub shrubs to large dominant woody shrubs.

I won't attempt to list them all but we can start with *P. verticillatus* and *P. saccatus*, both fast growing ground covers for the semi shade.

They are great fillers under large shady trees and this time of the year are covered in white flowers which of course brings the fairies!

The well-known *Plectranthus* Mona Lavender, an intermediate shrub to 1m and a stunner with its deep lavender mauve flowers is a must.

The bigger varieties like *Plectranthus ecklonii* are taller with large leaves and need a bit more space in semi shady areas.

Their flowers range from blue to white to pink and are certainly eye catching subjects when in full bloom.

Like most flowering plants they respond well to a prune back after flowering as they tend to get tall and woody with age!

Today there are many species and hybrids available in the nursery.

Overall, I think they colour in the gaps in established gardens enjoying either in morning sun or dappled shade positions.

Well the same goes for the popular *Barleria*'s an interesting member of the *Acanthus* family.

They flower mainly from March to April but I find that the common bush violet- *Barleria obtusa* flowers both in the winter and summer months.... A bit of a non-conformist you might say!

*Barleria* Tickled Pink is a low shrubby ground cover with pinky red flowers that will do in full sun.

A shrubby trailing variety 'Purple Prince' does well in full sun to semi shade.

*Barleria*'s can get a bit woody so a light pruning after flowering should keep them leafy.

The Ribbon Bush *Hypoestes aristata* which comes in mauve and white is also something suited to semi shaded neglected areas!!!

Here again they perform best in the garden when cut back after flowering.

If you do get a bit of whitefly on them blast the leaves, when watering by hand....it will help keep them at bay!

Something you have all heard of and seen in the wild or popping out next to the road, is the mystical Leonotus leonorus- The Wild Dagga.

It's not the popular Dagga we know of and no relation, but the aromatic leaves do impart a rather pungent smell when burning.....not totally unlike the real thing... which is quite apparent in the air lately and often confused with smog!! The bright orange flowers of the Wild Dagga are a signature in the wild garden but also comes in an apricot and beautiful white form.

Many appreciate the beauty of this plant but often steer away because it gets a bit woody after a few seasons.

This is no excuse because all you need to do is cut it back after flowering and 'wala' it comes back bushy and green with many more flowers next autumn. I have seen them as high as 2metres and covered in flowers.

It requires a sunny, well drained position and will bring many nectar and insect eating birds

All in all, you will be astounded by the number of plants that flower in Autumn, from March to May.

With the heat we experienced this summer and some early rain I think we are in for a surprise winter.

Cold and wet winters are necessary for glorious hot dry summers.

We would not appreciate one without the other and all the specialized plants which thrive under these opposing conditions!

Starting now and into the months ahead many proteas, pincushions and cone bushes will be coming into flower and here I must mention the Green Protea- Protea coronata which starts flowering as early as next month.

It can get up to 3 or 4m in height so can be used as a little specimen tree in small gardens.

It is unlike other proteas as the green flowers go unnoticed because they don't open like other proteas.

I find them most interesting and have seen quite a few growing well in gardens.

All I can say is enjoy, treasure, promote and conserve our beautiful Autumn and winter flora.

Until next week...