

March 27

A few days ago, while finding refuge indoors from the strong wind (mainly due to the dust factor), I was quite amazed how the dynamics of the landscape seem to change with wind.

Although the wind was predominately from the west, the trees and other plants would sway in all directions.

They would bend to the east, straighten up and then without hesitation sway to the south and then to the north!

Confusing to try and determine the actual directional source but be that as it may there was another exciting element to it all.

It was the graceful dance of continuity that had no formality or predetermined steps.

I so enjoy seasonal changes as each one brings something different which is a requirement of our natural world.

Changes in light and temperature wake some plants up while others take a break or just go to sleep.

I often think wind is an overlooked characteristic of seasonal change and for many it is just another windy day resulting in irritation and inconvenience.

We can't live without it as it is responsible for rain, spreading fire, moving soils, seed, pollen, insects, bird migration and disease.

It is the power behind land, sea and air travel and the smallest of gusts can take your hat off.

Like so much of the natural world we cannot control it...thankfully.

Movement brings life to the garden physically and through colour as leaves flutter and show the variation between top and underside.

Unfortunately, this wonderful phenomenon, is rather lost in formal gardens due to the stiffness of man made lines and unnatural shapes.

The more natural the garden, the more it will be enhanced by air movement.

To fully appreciate this, we need plants that respond to the slightest air movement which will bring about the dance.

Small suburban gardens are very often the ideal place as we notice taller exposed plants moving in one direction while lower plants move in a different direction, all the result of wind turbulence in enclosed spaces.

It brings about a three-dimensional aspect much like watching a life stage production of River dance but more a Wind dance with sound effects and continual movement.

A few plant suggestions could include *Polygala virgata*- the Purple Broom with its spikes of purple magenta flowers on long reed like stems which can get up to 2m in height.

They grow easily, are waterwise and the seed which is dispersed by wind and water, germinates and pops up in the most unlikely places.

Flowering time is spring or thereabout and they attract many insects so a very definite 'must have' plant in any garden!!

Of course, most restio's are perfect wind plants and they come in many shapes and sizes but if I can recommend one it would be *Thamnochortus insignis*- the Common Thatching Grass which can reach a height of 1.5m or more and is an excellent dancer.

Alternatively, if its not available then use *Elegia tectorum*- the Dekriet which is about the same height and a good dancer.

They flower in Autumn and both the male and female flower heads are an added feature for the dance.

For larger gardens with wet areas the *Fluitjiesriet*- *Phragmites australis* is a true wind dancer.

They get up to a few metres tall with long silky flowerheads which sway deeply, often touching the ground before springing back again.

I find they are in constant motion, reminding us that wind is ever present!!

If you are looking for a spring dancer, then now is the time to get *Selago canescens* planted.

Commonly known as the Bitterbossie and getting to a metre or more in height they are totally covered with pink flowers from winter into spring.

It takes full advantage of the wind to give you a memorable show and all this accompanied by the flutter of butterflies.

Similar plants include the Confetti bushes both pink and white specimens.

Another favourite is the Featherhead- *Phyllica pubescens*.

They start flowering now and show off amazing colour variation under different light conditions.

Its fine silky appearance makes it an excellent choice for any garden and if you want a preview then head off to Kirstenbosch, on a windy day of course and you will find many huggable specimens!

If you need to include height, flowers, scent and dancing all in one then the Honeybell Bush- *Freylinia lanceolata* will do the job.

As a matter of interest and urgency, it is in flower right now!!

Its drooping willow like branches are perfect for all slow dances accompanied by a host of insects and birds attracted to the yellow, highly scented, nectar rich flowers.

I suppose a slow dance must have a good perfume around to be successful!

Well its Goodbye for now, have a great weekend and enjoy the dancing!