

FMR June 12

I am sure by now we are all beginning to feel the cold creeping in.

Believe it or not in about 9 days, on the 21 of June at about 6am we will have reached our Southern Winter Solstice which is theoretically our mid-winter.

As history has proven it certainly is not our coldest time so keep the home fire burning. We need a lot more rain and cold to get our gardens sparking but it will all come about. After June 21 the sun begins its journey south and we experience longer days with better quality sunlight, but amazingly it still gets colder.

It is a time of great energy in the wild and in our gardens.

Many local species are in full flower or preparing to, so we will all be energized by this natural phenomenon.

Present delights aside, if you want an exceptional spring garden then you will have to have everything in the ground now getting the full benefit of rain and the increase in ground temperature during the months ahead.

It is only approx 8 weeks to spring so enjoy the wonder of winter while it lasts.

Today I thought of a very special plant we are surrounded by but sometimes totally unaware of its existence.

We have all heard of the Rose scented Pelargonium, have probably all experienced its glorious scented oil but how many of us have it in the garden??

Proper name Pelargonium capitatum and I don't see many about.

Its pink flowers appear for 3-4 months as the weather warms up but the real joy comes from crushing the leaves and inhaling that rich rose scent.

It grows naturally along our coastline from the West coast to the south east under sometimes harsh conditions but it always remains bushy and handsome.

Waterwise to a fault it needs very little attention to do its thing.

One does not often see them much taller than 50cm with a spreading habit so it is the perfect specimen as a filler in any garden but also suitable in pots planters in challenging positions.

It is an ideal coastal plant and always looks good from the middle of winter well into summer, so please move over and make space for this special local.

It is a very easy plant to grow and maintain, quite happy in full sun or a bit of shade and without doubt a perfect waterwise subject.

It does prefer a fairly well drained soil but I have seen them growing happily in most soil types.

It can be used as a skin softener simply by rubbing the leaves on your hands and getting that scented oil to penetrate the skin.

Of course, there are many other scented Pelargoniums to consider from the peppermint pelargonium to the citrus scented species.... So get to know them and use them.

I think we are in for lots of rain this winter but whether we do or not, get that mulch down to keep the water and soil where they belong plus hold down weed growth.

Years ago I met an interesting gardener who planted up much of his garden with winter oats this time of the year.

It grew up tall, hid most of his plants but in summer he used the cut product as mulch.

Just like straw or other mulch it did a good job over the hot dry period.

Another unusual plant for the garden is the Berry Heath- Erica baccans.

Commented [D1]:

Don't listen to those who say Ericas are difficult to grow....they are not, if given the right conditions.

Nothing special, just good drainage, a sunny position and don't fiddle around the roots.

Yes, in general they can be fed lightly with an organic food but keep the phosphate content low.

Most thrive in poor soils but a bit of good compost at planting does not seem to upset them.

Just think natural when planting any local fynbos species.

The beautiful Berry Heath is a hardy local, that gives an awesome display in early summer.

Its endemic to the Peninsula so all the more reason to plant it in our gardens and assist in its protection and happy future.

I have also seen it as an excellent pot subject so cannot recommend this plant enough!!

In the Cape Town area alone, there are nearly 400 threatened plant species which encompass the whole spectrum of fynbos.

We need to be aware of the constant habitat destruction, resulting from development and poor land management.

We talk about the problem, write books, discuss it in academic forums but it is, in the end, up to the gardening fraternity to do something real about solving the problem.

Extinction works like the domino effect.... If one falls another has to fall and on it goes unless you intervene and stop the progress.

So let's begin planting for conservation and not just for our own enjoyment!!