

FMR June 26

Well here we are heading for spring!

Soon, will appreciate all those spring flowering bulbs, Namaqualand daisies and other easy pop ups.

I hope you managed to plant a whole bunch of mesems which will set the early summer alight and give you many weeks of glitterati!

Once again, at this time brightening up our winter, the aloes are doing their thing.

If you don't have at least one aloe in the garden you are missing out on a host of activity, especially when it comes to birdlife.

Besides an array of different sunbirds everyone gets in on the act.

White eyes, weavers and starlings arrive to enjoy that feast of sweetness besides the insect life that comes with it.

Aloe species and cultivars are numerous, hardy, low maintenance and most rewarding from mid winter onwards.

Often overlooked are the rambling aloes which create much interest in dense shrubberies, against fences and around retaining rock walls.

A favourite in gardens is Aloe ciliaris with its many bright, yellow tipped red flowers.

When planted amongst other shrubs you hardly notice the leaves tucked away but you cannot miss the flowers which emerge all over the show.

The big bonus with this aloe is that it usually flowers throughout the year!!

Another very useful scrambling aloe is Aloe gracilis which can climb up to about 2metres and I have also seen them used as an interesting hedge.

The red flowers are graceful and slender appearing from early May to July and sometimes still going strong in August.

Aloe tenuior is another special Rambler that comes in a variety of colours ranging from yellow through to bright red.

All aloes are easy to grow but just don't overwater them and allow them to do their own thing without too much interference!!

Aloe arborescens and A ferox are popular and I have seen so many exceptional specimens here on the peninsula.

I must mention our very own local aloes which need a spot in the fynbos garden. A commixta- a decorative trailing plant, A succotrina- with its bright orange red flws and A plicatilis now called Kumara plicatilis – the well known Fan aloe

You will also notice the many beautiful gigantic tree aloes like Aloidendron barberae with their unusual pink flowers.

It is often referred to as Baines' aloe or Tree aloe and is quite unmistakeable.

In this regard I refer you to Ernst van Jaarsveld's publication ...Tree aloes of Africa with Illustrations by well known botanical artist Eric Judd.

There are of course many other plants in flower right now

They include- the Felicias both blue and white flowering species, Buddleja auriculata- the Weeping Sage, Tecoma-Cape Honeysuckle, the Bitou bush and everyone's favourite, the beautiful Silver leaved Pea bush- Podalyria sericea. It is the most striking plant with its soft silvery leaves and pink flowers, getting to about a metre in height.

It will do well in a sandy loam soil and is, like many in the pea family waterwise. Its natural habitat has been destroyed to a large extent and it is classified as vulnerable. What a better reason to have it in the garden?

There is also the Protea family...too many to mention so you will have to get out there and see them in the wild!!

Lets not leave out the most stunning and rewarding exotic -Bougainvillea!!

A dream plant, adorning doorways, rockeries and north facing structures....you just can't go wrong with them.

All hybrids available today are sterile, do not produce seed and are propagated by cuttings and other vegetative means.

They originated in South America and are popular in many Mediterranean countries where they do well under harsh coastal conditions.

They are not environmentally very productive like our local plant material. But they do attract spiders and other creepy crawlies and are safe habitats for nesting birds.

The bushier varieties make excellent pot specimens in the blazing summer heat, as they are very waterwise and require little attention.

Ok! So where to from here?

Don't cultivate or loosen soil at this time, the big rains are coming and loose soil will be washed away.

All that rich soil you have put so much into will go down the drain and it will take many years to build up again!!

That's why it was so important to mulch with all the Autumn leaves and grass clippings. It's not a fashionable exercise, it's an essential one!!

It's never too late so stop digging and scoffling and start mulching!

You can wait at least another month before pruning roses and deciduous fruits. Fortunately the wilder the garden the less maintenance needed.

From now on it's time to start enjoying longer days with more sun, not too noticeable now, but it changes every minute.

It's goodbye until next week, but don't put the hot water bottle away just yet!