

July 10

Due to a request again this week, I thought we would start off with a little discussion on the subject of lavender.

It is probably one of the most popular plants in Mediterranean areas and certainly a Cape favourite.

The correct naming has always been a challenge!

Dutch, English, French, Spanish, Australian...what next

How about Cape lavender, that sounds good and fitting!!

There seems to be more than 30 species of lavender, with some sub species attached but the confusing issue is that there are probably hundreds of cultivars named by breeders.

The name Dutch and English lavender is confusing as they do not originate from these countries, but it is possible that they were the first to use and trade lavender outside of the many Mediterranean countries of origin.

The most popular by far is *L. angustifolia* commonly known as English lavender.

It has many cultivars but generally is considered the hardiest and most useful species giving us oil, perfume, dried flowers and other products

No matter what you call them and how they grow there are a few basics you need to know in order to have happy lavenders.

Firstly, they do prefer a neutral to slightly alkaline soil but tolerate a mild acid soil.

I personally believe they have a longer life span in slightly alkaline soil.

They need sunny conditions and well drained soil which is not too rich.

Wet conditions are not on their like list and that is one of the reasons they often go off in Cape gardens.

The heavy winter rain and low light conditions are often just too much, and they don't always fully recover if too old and woody.

At the same time, we do tend to spoil them with overfeeding so I would only recommend a light organic feeding with say a 3;1;5, 2-3 times a year not in the middle of a cold wet winter!

When in the perfect spot the only real bit of maintenance is light pruning.

I must admit that in my visits to many gardens, I hardly ever see good looking mature lavenders.

They are tall, lanky and sad, with a few flowers perched on bare stems that should have been pruned back two seasons ago.

So, when do we cut back these wonderful 'give all' plants?

Most seem to flower all year round but cut back about a third after a good flush of flowers, usually towards the end of its first year.

This will promote growth lower down and give you a more bushy, vegetative plant.

The same light pruning can be done in subsequent seasons and in the end you land up with a sturdy plant that flowers well.

Don't wait for the plant to get too woody lower down because usually they don't have the energy to shoot out again.

They don't have a long lifespan but if in the right position with good care they can live longer than 5 yrs.

Lavenders are hardy waterwise plants that require minimal attention, just make sure they get enough sun and are in a well drained position.

They fit in well with our local fynbos and thankfully have never become a problem as an invasive species.

They belong to the salvia family, of which there are many locals to keep them company!

We jump from lavenders to the pea's.

I am pleased to see, that the not so well-known little tree, *Indigofera jucunda* or Indigo tree is been used a lot more in gardens and landscapes.

It is also known as *Indigofera frutescens*

If left to its own devices it might turn out as a large bush but with a little help it can be pruned into a graceful small tree up to 4m or more in height.

The highlight without doubt are the small pink and white flowers which have that typical pea scent enjoyed by us and animals alike!!

In cold weather they can lose a few leaves.

The best position for them is a warm sunny protected spot and like many of the pea family they will tolerate slightly damp conditions for a while.

They occur naturally in the summer rainfall areas of Eastern Cape up to KwaZulu Natal, but I see many happy specimens in and around our city.

Due to the expected cold you can plan on doing the pruning thing towards the end of the month into the first half of August but whatever your plan is please don't go and cut everything that is leafless.

You can also plan to have large trees thinned out especially if they very dense and pose a shade problem.

Please don't start amputating large branches in the hope of improving light penetration... it only makes matters worse.

We have a lot of leeway with how we do certain things in the garden but there is only one way to prune trees, and that's properly!!

If you are uncertain where to start, then contact a qualified arborist and get the job done properly.

Well, that's me for today. Goodbye and see you next week.

