

July 17

We often hear the expression- You can't put that plant there, it just doesn't go! You can't mix roses and succulents or those colours don't blend!

Well the good news for the uninformed style fanatics is that they all go together if you just step back from the norms and dictates of fashion.

The more colours, textures and characters you have around you, as in nature, the more interesting and innovative you become.

Built landscapes that are filled with mass plantings, stereo monoculture and formality, creating unproductive minds that don't see natural diversity and hence do not have a vision!

I often watch the behaviour of people crossing open and barren city spaces which have few if any trees and some planters, all massed with the same plants with lots of concrete all about.

Most people have heads down and move through the space without giving the landscape a second glance.

Nothing of particularly interest to look at, not enough shade, no colour to speak of and certainly no provision made for quality passive recreation.

The aim is to cross the plaza as quick as possible or make for one of the shady coffee shops with colourful umbrellas, potted plants and social buzz.

I am told by some that these open plazas were designed to move people and not necessarily improve the harsh man made environment.

I won't tell you my answer to that, but my conclusion is that the natural environment plays a major role in our psyche and attitude both to our surroundings and fellow beings.

We create our gardens for just the opposite reason.

We take in all the beauty by moving slowly amongst our plants with our heads up!!

Now that we have the psychology behind us lets get on with the basics and all the wonderful things we can do to benefit our living space.

A positive start can just be getting into the exciting world of owls by setting up an owl box in or near your garden.

The Spotted Eagle Owl and Barn owl are probably the most common in suburban gardens and therefore easy to house.

Providing a home for owls is rewarding and entertaining....I don't like the word entertaining but they can keep you occupied for hours especially when breeding which goes on from now to spring. The benefits are many-

- a reduction in unwanted rodents
- assisting in the conservation of owls
- a great educational journey for the whole family
- last, but not least the wonder of listening to their calls at night

Owl boxes and other bird nesting materials are commercially available so why not join the movement to give our birds a habitat and a future! I suggest you email info@birdlife.orz.za for information on how to build an owl box or get someone to install one in your garden.

Today I want to recommend an all-round plant which could have a multifunction purpose in your garden.

You might know it as the Wild Currant which grows all over Table Mt, in fynbos and around our coastline.

It was previously known as *Rhus tomentosa* but now the correct name is *Searsia tomentosa*

The underside of the leaf is pale silvery green giving good effect when the wind blows.

It gets to about 2m in height and width, makes a good screener and can be trained into a nice little tree.

The fruit attracts many birds and I have spotted a very patient chameleon waiting for insects to visit the flowers.

It is an exceptionally hardy plant requiring minimal attention and although quite common in the wild it could be used a lot more in our gardens.

If you want the joy of the sweet pea bushes this spring with their scented flowers, then now is the time to get them into the garden.

The larger species *Podalyria calyptrata*, like the Wild Currant gets a few metres high and can be used as a large shrub or small tree.

It is covered with highly scented pink flowers in spring and attracts numerous insects and birds.

The smaller pea bush, *Podalyria sericea* is probably more suited to smaller gardens growing to around a metre with a mass of pink flowers against the silver leaves.

Gardening becomes a lot more meaningful if we have confidence in what we are doing for the environment and ourselves.

Be it planting, pruning or feeding we must know the why, when and how if we wish to be successful.

It's not a scientific exercise and there is no such thing as green fingers, we were born with it, we just need to put it into practice.

A last thought, you will receive more from your garden if you don't garden only for yourself. Look beyond your needs and you will be surprised how it all falls into place.

Keep warm and stay dry!