

FMR August 28

Good morning! I must admit, like many others I do get confused sometimes as to when Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter officially start. We all have our own ideas and times about this subject but how wrong can we be about the start of spring when the flowers are out in every corner?

According to the celestial calendar the sun will cross the equator on its way south on the 22 September. This event is what we call our Spring Equinox when the hours of darkness equal the hours of light.

So in theory we are still experiencing winter hence the lower temperatures! So, after all that celestial stuff, the question is, what effect does spring have on us and all animal life?

We all know it is the time of growth and reproduction and it is unstoppable! Signs of spring are early this year due to good rains and we humans follow many traditional practices and activities at this time.

Nature provides us with a setting in which cultural processes, activities and belief systems develop which shape and improve diversity of all living organisms.

In the end we cannot take seasons for granted as the same old, same old story. Right now it's all happening in our very own gardens and it's a special time of awareness.

To be blunt, it is time to set our gardens free and allow them to do their business without interference from us.

The more we interfere the less is going to happen!

Whether we are tilling the soil, trimming and cutting back to reduce growth, or fighting insect life we are upsetting a cycle essential for all wildlife in the garden.

This is the best time to just sit back, become a facilitator and enjoy the process. One example of reducing disturbance is to reduce mowing to possibly once a fortnight and even allowing certain areas of grass to grow at will without mowing.

Today many small gardens don't have lawns at all in order to reduce maintenance and water usage.

Large gardens still have extensive lawn areas and in most cases this is in the form of high maintenance Kikuyu grass.

If you don't mow this regularly you end up with grass that is 10-20cm high. An untidy disaster one might think, but let's look at the benefits.

Less mowing, no fertilizing, fewer weeds and of course adding a new dimension to that boring flat continuous surface we like to call our lawn!

Long grass becomes a feature as it sways with the slightest breeze and it increases the activity of butterflies, other insects and not least of all birdlife!!

You can start by not mowing a few informal patches or go the whole hog, leaving the lawn to go wild and just creating a few mowed pathways to get from A to B.

These pathways lead to secret places for the children or even used as a cycle track! It all adds a new dimension of functionality to a once flat space!

Between the leaves of the uncut grass are the flowers which we never see. These threadlike flowers attract many butterflies and it is quite a sight to see hundreds of butterflies busy around the wild grass.

We are traditionally indoctrinated with the idea that lawns should be kept as a clean flat surface but we can become very creative with a flat surface!!

We can do the same with other grasses like our very own Kweek – *Cynodon dactylon*. The flower heads add a purple hue to the lawn.

Like Kikuyu grass from East Africa it does tend to be invasive especially when you are attempting to create ornamental flowerbeds so a certain amount of control will be needed.

If you don't need a manicured lawn, then don't have one.

The alternative is a free and wild garden filled with diverse plants.

Keep in mind, not all grasses are running species, there are many local clump forming varieties to choose from.

There are of course the many *Restio*'s, those beautiful grasslike plants found throughout our wild areas here in the Cape.

What I am trying to say is that there are many alternatives to traditional gardens that will play a positive role in our environment and we should be giving them the space to prove themselves.

Many traditional gardening books and articles tell us the what, the when and how to garden.

What they don't tell us is what our gardens should be doing for the greater environment. Our plants have a function and we should be giving them the freedom to get on with it.

Finally, a reminder that the Arderne Garden are open to the public and next Saturday 4 Sept there will be a short tour of the gardens hosted by Friends of the Arderne gardens.

You can enjoy a special time with a knowledgeable guide who will show you the unique and unusual plants plus fill you in on the history of the gardens.

Meet at the entrance on Main Rd Claremont at 10am sharp. The cost is R50 which is a donation to the gardens. Bring your own tea to enjoy afterwards.

Goodbye from me and look forward to see you next Saturday