

FMR September 11

I briefly mentioned my flower trip last week and I am not going to tell you about every flower I saw. Some areas seem to have a lot less than others but there are always flowers around for those who look for them.

It would be a challenge to describe the many bulb species, daisies the vast pea family but it was not the spectacle that that got to me, more the natural happening and all that went with it.

We all enjoy it and benefit from it but it was also about the other life forms out there that depended on it, Insects, birds, many mammals!

The challenging part of the journey was trying to remember names of plants I had not seen for a year or more and when I eventually did remember, I found out that most of the names had changed.

In the end I decided to stick with the old names as naming is just a human thing and it was more important to know what the plant was all about.

When we experience plants in their natural setting we realize just how unnatural most of our suburban gardens are with their design orientated and contrived look. The minimal selection, formal character in many, reflect a constant maintained look about them.

Surely, we must strive for more natural landscapes in our urban areas.

Garden designers must know better than a handful of species and should attempt to deviate from a garden filled with mass plantings.

I visit many gardens, both private and public open spaces and in most cases I believe the creators of these gardens have little or no idea of the dynamic associated with the surrounding natural environment.

I fully understand the history and traditional aspects of gardening.

I appreciate the work that went into great gardens like Versailles, the man hours spent building and maintaining them, but in the end they were constructed in the eyes of man and not in the eye of nature.

Building a more natural garden is not a big challenge because in the long term it grows itself and is a sustainable entity.

It requires little input from us so why not just go wild and forget all that difficult and fiddley stuff we call gardening!!

This week, instead of talking trees I thought we could chat about two amazing shrubs we should be using more often simply because they do the kind of job we need more of in our gardens.

The African Wormwood – *Artemisia afra* is not only pretty good looking but a useful allrounder.

The soft greeny grey leaves act as a neutral background showing up vibrant colours.

I like to think of it as a good host...out of the limelight but making it happen!

It is hardy, Waterwise and requires little maintenance unless you would like it as a hedge or kept neat and tidy.

They don't get much higher than 1m but should you want to prune them then wait for the small creamy/yellow flowers to finish and then only cut back about a third.

Of course, it is much easier and practical to let them be wild and wonderful. It is one of our most well-known medicinal plants dating back to early history. It was used to treat colds, fever, headaches, intestinal worms , used as a tea and believe it or not- a body wash.....not sure what you would smell like afterwards but why not give it go.

Like much of the daisy family their leaves contain a very aromatic oil and one of the most popular uses is to clear the nasal passages when you have a head cold and feel a bit bunged up .

Just pick a few leaves, scrunch them up a bit to get the oil going and then...shove it up your nostrils. Its not pretty but it works well!!

Another shrub is one of my favourites and easy to know why??

Halleria elliptica, commonly known as the Wild Fuchsia or Rock Fuchsia.

You probably know its big cousin quite well The Tree Fuchsia- Halleria lucida.

The Wild Fuchsia only gets to about 1.5m in height and is an ideal specimen anywhere in the garden where space is minimal or even in a container.

It can handle sun or semi shade, dry or wet and rich or poor soils.

The bright red flowers are irresistible to birds and insects who relish the copious nectar and fruit supply, so there is always activity about.

The fruit can be eaten fresh or made into a sort of jelly jam.

It is perfect for Peninsula gardens and is not grown enough commercially.

It requires no pruning and has a 'bamboo' look which is neat and fits in anywhere. It is endemic to the Western Cape so we should be using it more.

That's it for today and keep in mind.....

*We can really only understand nature if we think like nature!*

Goodbye and enjoy your weekend!