

Sept 18

Good Morning I did promise to mention a few hardwood herbs that are useful both as garden subjects and essential culinary additions.

I ask myself.... Do we really know our herbs that well?

First off the mark is good old common Rosemary which we all take for granted.

Its always there through thick and thin, flowers profusely and is one of the best all-rounders you can have in the garden, be it as an ornamental, something formal, wild or just a culinary essential!

Maybe its time we got to know this plant a lot better.

Its well-known botanical name was *Rosmarinus officinalis* but it has been changed to *Salvia officinalis* so don't get confused with the label in the nursery!

Its common name remains Rosemary which will never change because how on earth can you call it by any other name? It belongs to the huge Lamiaceae family, we often refer to as the Salvia, Sage or Mint family. There are nearly 1000 *Salvia*'s species worldwide of which about 30 are found in South Africa.

Personally, I cannot think of one good reason for the name change!

Blue flowering shrubs are a bit scarce so the bright blue flowers of certain Rosemary varieties will definitely add much to the colour quality in any garden!

They do nevertheless come in many forms both upright and trailing with flowers ranging in colour from pink to white to a deep blue.

A favourite for many is McConnells Blue which does not get much higher than 50cm and is perfect for containers!

I have also seen specimens as interesting bonsai plants

Like most Rosemary plants they flower from early spring through the hot summer months and if very happy in their position they will continue into the cooler months.

Like most hardwood Mediterranean herbs, Rosemary is waterwise, preferring well drained slightly sandy soil but it seems to grow in most soil types in a sunny position.

Keep in mind, that all herbs, both soft and hardwood prefer full sun.

Another great benefit is that they attract beneficial insects like bees and repel so called pest like aphids and leaf eating gogga's.

Should you experience the unfortunate arrival of woolly aphid or red spider mite, the reason could be twofold.

Firstly, not enough sun and air circulation and secondly the same old problem that most plants suffer from....too much water.

Without doubt a major problem for most plants which sadly we can only blame ourselves for.

Traditionally it has been used over the ages to alleviate muscle pain, reduce inflammation, improve memory, promote hair growth, jack up the immune system , improve circulation and not least boost alertness, intelligence and focus.....all of which is not scientifically proven but they did leave out the fact that it might stop the ageing process...so there is hope yet!!

The other valuable herb used for both its culinary and ornamental value is *Origanum*.

If you don't use it in the kitchen then it is the perfect flowering plant for the garden!

It comes in many forms as well, both as a bush and a ground cover.

The most commonly used, is *Origanum vulgare* often referred to as common Origanum or wild Origanum.

It is more savoury than its close relative Marjoram which has a more sweet aroma but they both fall under the genus *Origanum*!

Origanum is most striking when in flower.

It starts off in summer with a dark pink to purple bud which opens as a pink to white flower and goes on for many months, that is if you don't eat them to the ground!

The entire *Salvia* family is renowned for its flowers and other properties so look further and find out more about these useful plants, both the exotic and indigenous species.

Right now there are only 4 days left to our Spring Solstice, the official start of spring.

I am afraid to say our spring flowers might disagree, certainly because of I saw a week ago.

It is the time nevertheless for us to start afresh with new ideas in the garden and maybe even change our attitude about this human pastime we call gardening.

Lets try and make it more natural and in fitting with our wild and wonderful natural world.

We don't need to dominate and conquer nature, we just need to take our rightful place and become part of it.

I think Henry David Thoreau put it in a nutshell when he said

'All good things are wild and free'

Good byeSee you next week