

October 2

I thought I would start off with a quick nudge about the importance of perennials , as they are about to, if not already dominating the landscape!!

The benefits of real perennials are many but we still don't use them enough

The broad meaning is that the plant lives for a few years as opposed annuals.

Some confusion sets in with biennials which usually take a season to establish, flower the following season, then die off like Foxgloves, Hollyhocks and Canterbury bells.

An example of an all-time favourite annual is *Ceratotheca triloba* the Wild Foxglove which is found naturally on the eastern side of SA into Natal.

Its quite popular up country being a summer rainfall plant, but those I see at Kirstenbosch are more than perfect.

It is a striking plant with pale pink to mauve flowers, evident over a long period in the summer and is a favourite with bees.

When we talk of perennials, we usually refer to herbaceous perennials and not the woody specimens like Lavender, Daisy bushes and other hardwoods.

I think herbaceous perennials are a very much under sold as they are the backbone of colour in any landscape besides the fact that they attract many butterflies, bees and other pollinators.

Take for example the popular exotic *Gaura* the 'Wind Flower'

It flowers for many months and requires little attention.

They have a nice strong root system which has the capacity to push out a lot of growth.

I do find with our winter rain they get too wet and are susceptible to mildew.

On the local and indigenous side there is a huge range of suitable plants.

*Linum africanum*- known as Yellow Flax and *Monopsis lutea*, the yellow violet can be mixed in with the blue *Monopsis* and *Scabiosa* to make a good contrast.

The perennial *Psuedoselago serrata*- commonly called the Powderpuff is a hardy specimen which grows naturally on our local mountains!

It's pretty cousin *Selago canescens* or Bitterbush usually flowers before most spring plants wake up!!!

A favourite for me is *Chironia baccifera* the Christmas Berry, with its starlike pink flowers and bright red berries. Now is the time to get it in!!

If pink blows your hair back then look at *Orphium frutescens*.. The Sea Rose, which is hard to beat!

If it's a slightly moist area near water then look for the River Fuchsia- *Phygelius*

I must mention a favourite exotic perennial ....blue *Salvia*- *Salvia farinacea* which comes in many cultivars, all are stunning and worthwhile having.

Like *Gaura* they will possibly have a lifespan of 3-5 years depending on the weather conditions and soil quality.

Other popular old favourites include *Pentstemon* which come in a variety of colours and Canterbury Bells with their array of colours from purple to blue to pink and white.

It seems though that many of the old traditional exotic perennials are nevertheless been replaced with more suitable local plants that require less water and less attention.

If it hardy you need then look at the selection of local salvias as well.

Salvia africana- caerulea the 'bloublomsalie' be it at the seaside or in the mountains, it does well anywhere.

You just hack them back when flowering is over and in no time they start all over again.

Another hardy blue species is the Afrikaanse salie- Salvia chamelaegnea which usually flowers around Nov/Dec up until autumn.

Keep in mind that pruning after flowering improves the vegetative side of things and extends the lifespan of many plants.

Just remember that a hot summer has been forecasted so don't hold back on mulching of any sort. It doesn't have to be finely chopped up, the bigger it is, the longer it takes to break down and less chance of the wind taking it next door.

I know many gardeners still till the soil in between plants with the idea that it aerates the soil and allows more moisture penetration?

This is not so and a great waste of energy as the weeds grow faster and the soil dries out quicker.....just mulch and forget!!!

So, to end our chat today, please consider using more perennials in the garden, they are economical and rewarding... to say the least.

Its not too late to join this mornings tour around the historical Arderne Garden. Meet at the entrance on Main Rd, Claremont at 10am. The cost is R40.00, bring a flask and enjoy a few hours with some of the most interesting and historically important plants here in the Cape. These informative guided tours take place on the first Saturday of every month. For more about The Friends of the Arderne Gardens please visit their website.

If you are new to the Cape and interested in gardening, why not join the Cape Horticultural Society to learn about local things and meet likeminded people.

If you need more info please phone Glenda on 021 531 5713

Until next Saturday its .. Goodbye