

October 30

Another week and on we go, always looking for more time to fit everything in.

If you want that big measure of satisfaction then take a look at your garden and see what you have accomplished as a good nature facilitator.

Birds, bees or that new organic process you introduced to create something more natural and sustainable.

Could it be, that one special threatened plant you found a home for when told that it's natural habitat has been destroyed by the very urban sprawl you are part of.

If so, then your year has not been in vain and why not double up next year.

The garden for most is not a priority as long as the lawn is cut and there are less weeds than useful ornamentals.

The difference can be minimal as weeds are in many cases just as handsome as the costly hybrids, they grow faster and to top it all probably need less attention.

I am sure you all know that weeds are the mother plants of most ornamentals, we just turned them into something that was socially acceptable!!

Oh, that word weed!! The label given to anything we didn't plant and is fast growing!

For Pete's sake don't just pull out anything that pops up!

It might be something special that has, with the help of local fauna, managed to germinate in your garden.

Might be worthwhile waiting for them to grow a bit, identify them if possible and only then if necessary, transfer them to the compost heap!!!

Many gardeners are renowned terminators, removing anything that vaguely looks a bit of a rogue.

Besides the usual toxic compounds, other tools of the trade include sharp scissors, blunt instruments, litres of household substances ranging from Handy Andy, methylated spirits, and homemade recipes which contain vinegar, bleach, green soap and believe it or not peri-peri powder!!!

Some are of course are highly successful because firstly they the kill off all the plants, the secondary effect being that all the insects also die due to lack of food and poisoned soil.

So the short term result is no insects or plants! The long term scenario.... no gardens!

My suggestion...try and keep the plants and insects.

Insects are here to stay and there is a hundred and one ways of keeping them at bay without nuking both them and the plants.

The important question is, whether these insects actually destroy the plants?

Besides a few leaves and flowers, not really!

The most simplest and cost effective method is to try and encourage the natural cycle to work.

Most insects are controlled by other insects and birds but we can help the control by just washing plants off with a blast of water, physically removing some of the large worms and beetles by hand and using certain sprays that don't have a major negative effect on the environment.

A good example here is the Biological caterpillar spray that uses a bacteria as the active ingredient.

Other safer natural compounds include fatty acids as the active ingredient which literally dissolve the soft tissue with little secondary effect!

Keep in mind that no matter how organic or environmentally friendly an insecticide is, it still kills insects across the spectrum so the end result is the same.

By using plants that attract a variety of birds and insects you will nevertheless be off to a good start! Its not really necessary to kill and insects!!

I came across a rather deadly method used by some to control snails which has a really bad long term effect!

That is, sprinkling salt all over the garden!

Concentrated salt in any form is deadly to most plants so not advised at all.

My advice is to have a closer look at the many homemade concoctions recommended by others as they are not always the healthy alternative!

Besides I do believe much of it is hearsay!!

Back to plants....

After a rewarding walk last weekend I realised that we have hardly scratched the surface when it comes to using our own local plants .

We marvel at what our wild areas give us, but often don't visualize them as domesticated specimens!

One particular plant really stuck out for me, not only because of it stunning flowers but its character and very presence.

It was the Purple Broom, *Polygala virgata*....mine has been flowering for a month!!

It is very widespread, not from the SW Cape but very happy to set up home here as you see them growing easily in many gardens.

It's a fast grower, gets to around 2m in height but is not bushy, which to me is a great characteristic, especially in smaller gardens as one can then plant smaller things around the base.

They develops straight stems with a mass of flowers on the terminal ends, a bit like a flowering bamboo!

They handle any type of soil and self seed without too much encouragement.

The spectacular eye-catching purple/blue flowers are about from early spring to summer and attract a range of insects.

Without doubt a must have plant which I recommend them for any of garden.

Lastly, if you like aromatic leaves, especially the strong smell of citrus, then get yourself a Lemon scented Pelargonium- *Pelargonium citronellum*.

It grows well with a bit of shade and has attractive pink flowers but the prize is without doubt the strong, clean aroma of a million oranges.

Don't forget next Saturday...the first Saturday in Nov when you can join a casual tour of the Arderne Gardens...Meet at the entrance on Main Road Claremont.

The cost is R50 which goes towards the upkeep and promotion of these special gardens.

Wishing you a happy week, getting your garden to grow from the outside in!