

November 6

This is a very busy time of the year, luckily not so much for us but certainly what's going on in our gardens and in the wild.

If you had set your garden free as I requested at the beginning of the season, then take a look and see what's happening.

There is some interesting stuff going down out there and one particular phenomena involves the Wild Peach- *Kiggelaria Africana*, if you are lucky enough to have one.

Its looking great with its summer growth and although classified as a semi deciduous tree its rarely without leaves so I call it an evergreen as most evergreens drops leaves continually to make way for the new!!

The Wild Peach does nevertheless respond differently under various climatic conditions so call it what you like.

Their little, rather insignificant pale greeny yellow flowers appear anytime from early to mid summer and end up as a little knobbly capsule containing the seed which by the way is easy to germinate.

Early in summer, around about now things seems to go cuckoo!!

There are a lot of butterflies about but one in particular seems to hang around the Wild Peach.

It's the Common Garden *Acraea* butterfly and easily identified by its spotted orange-coloured wings.

It uses the Wild Peach to lay its numerous eggs on and become a host for the larvae to feed on.

The lava is a small black caterpillar and hundreds of them hatch.

In order to survive they start munching away on the leaves, and munch they do until the tree is virtually defoliated!

For some this is a scary sight to witness believing it to be the beginning and the end of the garden.

So worrying fact that many uninformed gardeners go screaming into the Garden Centre with the sole purpose of finding the quickest method to nuke them!!

Fortunately today, most, but not all gardeners and nurseryman are more well informed about this amazing and essential natural phenomena!!

The end result is perfect with your tree coming out of the ordeal smiling and happy!

What you might ask are the benefits of it all?

There are many but the main ones are, improved soil health due to a ton of caterpillar dropping and leaf drop (in house fertilizing mechanism!), greater insect diversity (think of all the insect predators that go for the butterfly, the eggs and the caterpillar.

You are also going to see an increase in birdlife, probably a few you have never seen before!

Cuckoo's, are one of the few birds that eat the caterpillar which by the is quite poisonous to some predators.

Keep a sharp lookout for Diederiks Cuckoo which you might have heard but never seen!

Their call is a piercing and repetitive Dee..dee.. deederik!

The adult male is mainly green, with a dash of brown and white and a big red eye.

The female is not as colourful and a bit harder to identify.

In the end the Garden *Acraea* butterfly brings about a small miracle, so the use of insecticides is definitely out of the question.

Right now those flowering annuals like *Impatiens*, *Petunia's*, *Zinnia's*, *Dianthus* and all the rest are well settled and starting to bud and flower.

If you want them to get bushy and flower for a long time, that is right into Autumn then nip them back early, even if it means removing the first flowers. Its hard to do when you are enjoying those first flowers but it is necessary!

In the vegetable garden leafy varieties like spinach and lettuce are growing at a fast rate and you are probably harvesting already.

Tomatoes , chilli's and Egg plant are going to take a bit longer, depending on when they were planted.

If you want a good tomato crop then are a few do's and don'ts!

Don't overwater....but they do require a regular, evenly spaced watering regime.

They must not be allowed to dry out for an extended period...even if that means cancelling your holiday trip away!!!

If they do dry out on more than one occasion then they will develop what we call 'blossom end rot'.

This manifests itself with the development of a dark bruise-like patch on the bottom end of the tomato Which eventually causes the whole fruit to rot away! Such a waste! I suggest watering well every second day or depending on how quickly your soil dries out.

Soils that are well composted and mulched hold their moisture for longer periods!

We are witnessing a huge drive to establish more Mediterranean type gardens here in the western Cape.

The key factor is the use of suitable plant material and less planting of lawns if not needed.

Gravelled gardens or the use of peach pips and other mulch material is practical when it comes to water usage and minimal maintenance.

A word of advice when deciding to lay gravel.

Make sure the area is level as you don't want the gravel or peach pips to land up in the bottom of the garden after the first rain!!

It is imperative to lay down a weed barrier or geo fabric before hand as this will stop weeds coming through and allow water to penetrate the soil. This is why we cannot use plastic sheeting, unless of course you enjoy getting all that gravel back in place after washing away!!

That's it for today...lets get out there and do it properly!!

Goodbye and see you next week.