

November 13

The term designer plant is used frequently in the landscape design world and it confuses me to no end. We use the term form plants as well and it probably more descriptive in a design or art sense.

I just don't understand the use of 'designer plant' to describe the merits of something that in fact, has the perfect design which cannot be improved or stand above any other plant.

How do you add design to an environment that is fully designed and operational?

Does it make sense to you because it does nothing for me.

Why do we only see the aesthetic side of plants... what it looks like, how beautiful it is but not what it does.

We all know appearances aren't everything... they result in shallow assumptions!!

When we look at a wild area of fynbos, bushveld or forest are we aware of design in a human sense.

I don't think so! I see nature with a bunch of plants, animals and micro organisms all working together as a great energy source that contributes to a natural process which in turn keeps it alive and sustainable.

As humans we do appreciate colour and form but we can't just focus on this w in order to add value to the landscape.

I remember how fashionable and stylish it was in the 70's and 80's when it was all about bold mass planting of a few types with no consideration given to the actual workings of the environment.

It was all about the dynamic visual effect then and little else!

It was an artform and the plants were merely the medium used.

Thankfully, we have moved on and now see greater diversity and more natural landscapes, which play a positive role in the system.

I came across a meaningful quote by Elizabeth Wray Taylor a while back which puts it all in a nutshell!

She says... *'Wholeness is a quality of beauty. It need not be perfect as to features, but must be sincere as to purpose.*

*It need not be absolute as to design, but it must be honest as to motivation.*

Maybe its time we looked at nature for what it is, not what we want it to be!

So enough of that...in the meantime the roses are in flower and bougainvillea's refuse to stop flowering.

If you want your roses to look good and continue flowering well into December then don't just cut the old flower heads off, prune stems back as though you were picking for the vase.

This will encourage new strong growth which will bring on an abundance of flowers.

While you're at it, a small handful of 3;1;5 or 5;1;5 Organic around the base, well-watered in, should encourage healthy growth.

I am sure you have also had a great season with Camellias and Azaleas. Don't forget them as now is a critical time if they are not getting enough moisture.

Mulch is vital for these plants as they have small roots close to the surface and the last thing they need is the searing sun and lack of water.

They are of course not classified as waterwise plants but you can keep them moist and reduce their watering with a constant layer of mulch throughout the year.

The same can be applied to hydrangeas which need cool soil now if they are to flower well in December.

Don't overfeed them in the hope of a spectacular show, rather give a more diluted mix more often and don't allow them to dry out completely. Containers in general, especially those smaller than 20cm, are going to dry out quickly so any form of mulch is essential.

If not organic material then use stone, drainage chips or cut up cardboard if you prefer to recycle material.

It's too late when your prize plants dry out and start dying back...do it now and give yourself peace of mind.

Now is a good time to start putting in your second round of veg and herb seedlings if you want to eat well until the weather cools down.

A second planting of tomato and greens should be done as soon as possible if you want that later crop in good time and why not another 6 pack of sweet basil, as there is never too much.

Basil does tend to get a bit spindly in early growth so don't be shy to pinch it back and get it as bushy as possible.

Most vegetables like cool soil and a regular watering regime so cover the ground with a thick layer of compost or mulch.

The best time to water the garden is early morning or evening but sadly I still see sprinklers going flat out in the heat of the day.

About this time you might notice a small tree or large shrub in flower around the city. It has star shaped purple flowers and looks pretty tough.

It might well be the Cross berry *Grewia occidentalis*, a widespread plant found virtually throughout SA.

Although a multi-stemmed and rather untidy looking it can be pruned and trained into a small attractive tree or just leave as a bush.

The birds love the fruit and it is quite fast growing if helped along, just a little with regular water and a dash of food.

That's it from me ... lets get out there and make it happen