

November 20

The year is slowly closing, it has been a challenging time for us but hopefully our gardens are all the better for it.

The hot weather is moving in and the only sensible option is to head for a shady spot in the garden.

It just puts everything back into perspective and is probably our only safe refuge from traffic, noise and shopping malls.

If you don't have a shady spot then plant a tree...Now!

We can contribute a lot to our environment through our gardens by just been aware that they play a big role in the health of the city.

The more we know about our gardens and nature beyond the fence the better we understand our role in the process.

Not many of us know every plant in the garden, what their requirements are and what they actually do.

There is nothing more interesting and exciting than getting to know plants better and finding out what they do for a living

Whether they are indigenous, exotic, local, common weeds or unusual, it becomes a challenge to learn more about them.

We certainly are getting to know which plants survive in our unique climate..

In the end you enjoy and appreciate them much more and your interest will grow and grow.

The discussion on fashion and trendy design is fading away and we are just getting down to basics and doing the right thing.

Filling spaces with practical, low maintenance and useful plants.

Getting real, getting wild, getting simple.

We are moving away from colour schemes, formality and contrived gardens in favour of the more sustainable natural garden that is easy to manage and maintain!!

Complicated soil preparation is slowly been replaced by a much more natural process....no unnecessary turning of the soil or tilling for cosmetic reasons, greater use of organic material, be it compost or mulch and importantly using plants that are suited to our soil types and weather conditions.

Instead of changing the soil to suit the plant through a complicated process we now just use the right plant for our soil.

This results in plants that need less from us.

Its all about the new way, new thinking and better results

Lets just accept the fact that plants need very little from us and certainly don't need to be pampered in any way.

I visited a country garden which had been 'so called' restored to its former natural glory.

It was in a sensitive area adjoining a beautiful mountain reserve!

Descriptive words overheard were, environmentally friendly, indigenous, good rehabilitation, sustainability, waterwise, and all the rest.

The problem with all this and believe me we should not be too pure, is that

many of the plants might have been indigenous to SA but were not suited at all to the specific area and climate and therefore needed special attention to survive. They were not suitable so the natural landscape had actually not been restored in a true sense.

We don't have to have perfect gardens and we don't have to be fanatical purists. Sure, we can mix it up, but let's keep the description right.

Just be practical and consider the many suitable plants that are available and ready for planting, should you have the right spot.

An aspect of any all-round garden which never dates, is the edible part.

Always trendy and a 100% practical the herb and vegie garden has survived through the ages.

You don't need a special area set aside as they are just normal plants which fit in very well with other ornamentals.

If water is limited then a small patch makes watering easier.

Because we eat them doesn't mean we can't plant them in the ornamental and natural garden as most vegies and herbs make great companion plants.

If you are looking for some really innovative vegie garden ideas then I recommend a visit to Babylonstoren.

Go large, no need to restrict the selection.

I must mention one of my favourite plants.

A small hardy, drought tolerant tree, actually a large shrub.

It is *Searsia glauca*, previously *Rhus glauca* but commonly called The Blue Kuni bush. It get about 4m high and with a bit of pruning will give you the perfect tree for a small space.

Also ideal as a screen, so can be used efficiently in an informal hedge or windbreak.

It needs little attention and thrive in most soils except very wet spots.

I highly recommend all the local *Searsia*'s be they trees or shrubs as birds go for the fruit and they provide a safe habitat for many animals.

Looking forward to chatting next week