

November 27, 2021

The question this morning ...Where are we in the relationship with our garden?
Is there one, should there be one and why?

Do we have some measure of responsibility and commitment when it comes to the garden.

I admit I feel bad when I forget to water a needy plant or fill the bird bath.

If you don't feel like you are part of your garden them something is missing.

I always refer to gardening as an environmental activity... I don't see what else it could be!

It's a living entity which has ornamental and artistic characteristics but that's not the essence of it all.

Our gardens are an extension and very much part of the natural environment.
In fact, they probably take up more space in the greater metropole than our wild areas do resulting in a substantial impact, either negative or positive!

Just think for a minute, if Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden is roughly 500 hectares in size and a good example of our relationship with nature, filled with wildlife and diversity, then just consider the size and impact all the domestic gardens in the city.

Put them all together and you have an amazing extension to the wilderness which we become part of.

What we land up doing through our gardens is to mend and strengthen the relationship between cultivated gardens and nature.

Probably the easiest route to follow is to make them more natural and less man made with little effort.

We are all aware and concerned of habitat loss due to urban expansion and continued destruction of forest, fynbos and grassland.

The experts tell us that approx. 23% of natural habitats on earth will be gone by 2100.

The last pockets of rare, threatened and endemic plants disappear in the name of progress and I really believe we can counter this is through our gardens.

To succeed we must change the reasons why we garden and how we do things.
Its not a difficult task... all we have to do is think a little more natural and the picture paints itself.

Gardens are built around us for our pleasure and needs with little consideration given to what goes on beyond the fence.

Its time for change.

Plants and gardens are not ornaments

Most importantly you will feel the spirit of nature and what it does for us.

I hope you noticed the Rose scented Pelargonium, *P capitatum* on your wanderings.

If you missed it then find it in the nursery and experience the strong rose scented aromatic leaves.

This is the perfect plant for coastal gardens as it is waterwise and easy to grow. Cuttings root quickly and in no time you can have a few dotted about the garden.

Over the past few months we have seen many Helichrysums in flower all over the local veld and much further afield in the Karoo and along the coast.

This family of plants are most rewarding as they flower for long periods, and most, give all year round effect with their silvery leaves.

A really nice dense groundcover variety is *Helichrysum argyrophyllum*. The Golden Guinea Everlasting, originating in the eastern Cape.

I have used it extensively both up north and here in the western Cape to great effect.

It doesn't get much higher than 10cm but forms a beautiful dense mat in sunny spots but they do well with a bit of shade as well..

Our hot dry summers can be challenging and I would advise watering them every so often.

Although they grow in most soil types it is always a good idea to prepare soil with compost before planting.

They look good for a number of years but if they get a bit scraggly then just cut back and feed lightly with an organic fertilizer like a 3;1;5 or similar.

They are useful on slopes, in rockeries and make excellent hanging basket specimens.

What more can we ask for... a carpet made of silver that is easy to grow.

Something a lot bigger and in flower right now is the False Olive – *Buddleja saligna* also sometimes referred to as the Tree Buddleja.

It is one of the most handsome small trees we can have in a garden.

Its honey scented cream coloured flowers last for a few months and attract many butterflies and other insects

You can consider this tree basically indestructible, waterwise and hardy to a fault but still a very graceful and elegant tree.

A wonderful reference tool is the South African National Biodiversity Institutes site called PlantzAfrica. It has beautiful photographs, descriptions and how best to use our South African plants.

When it comes to some of our favourite exotic plants keep an eye on the Hydrangeas which start flowering soon.

They will require regular watering and maybe a bit of food to give a good show over the December period. That's it for this week, see you soon...Goodbye!