

December 25

A very Good morning to you all.

Many are celebrating Christmas and many are not, but we all wish each other a safe, healthy and happy time over this period and in the future.

A common denominator is family and friends at this time but there is also our bond to nature whether its our gardens or the wild spaces around us.

It could be a walk in the mountain, a stroll on the beach, a picnic in the park or just fun time at home in the garden.

These wonderful gifts from the natural world we often take for granted and sometimes show little appreciation for them, which actually demonstrates how far apart we are from it.

We are just a tiny part of our gardens ecology but our attitude and actions can make a huge difference to that circle of life around us.

Gardens in general are quite full of colour and scent at the moment.

Our solstice was 4 days ago so we are in the middle of summer and how lucky are we that generally its still quite cool with a bit of unseasonal rain!

We do tend to notice more in the garden when its cool and slightly overcast.

Right now, there are three local plants of great interest in my garden.

They are in flower and hard to miss.

The most dominant one is South Africa's favourite the Sweet Thorn, *Vachellia karroo*, previously known as *Acacia karroo*.

They seem to be flowering a bit later this year which doesn't deter the nest building activity and hordes of insects which depend on this tree.

Many species of butterflies and their caterpillars utilize the tree which in turn attracts many bird species.

One of my favourite birds is the Acacia Pied Barbet which hangs around 'Acacialand'...for want of a better word, mainly because of the tasty berries found on a variety of Mistletoe growing on Acacia trees and all the other fruit and insects about.

The other local plant with allround interest is *Cotyledon orbiculata*, known locally as Pigs ear or Plakkie.

Maybe I am lucky but mine flowered in winter and is about to do it all over again.

The flowers are welcomed by the sunbirds, especially the Malachite Sunbird who will virtually get stuck into the nectar if you are holding a flower in your hand.

Many insects are also drawn to the flowers which in turn brings in active little hunters like the Fiscal Flycatcher and the Fairy Flycatcher with his black mask, similar in looks and personality to Zorro a favourite fictional hero!!

Very little seems to miss their scrutiny!!

You are not going to miss the Hydrangeas or Pointsettias in the garden but you might overlook a special local you planted this year because it likes to grow in and under vegetation.

It might still be flowering or it might be in berry which are bright red and hard to miss.

Its *Chironia baccifera* or just called the Christmas Berry.

An easy plant to have growing wild, as it does well in full sun and semi shade, gets to about 50cm in height and not too particular as to soil type.

A very ornamental exotic which you will see and scent this time of the year is the Frangipani.

It originally comes from the Central American region and as far as I know has no invasive tendencies in South Africa.

A few locals you might still find in flower today if you care to take a walk after all the Turkey and pudding...Good idea actually!

They are the Pom pom tree *Dais cotinifolia*, Cape Chesnut - *Calodendrum capense* (if you are lucky)

Another pink flowering beauty is *Indigofera jucunda* – the Indigo tree.

Perfect for small gardens and town houses, it flowers from mid summer on for quite some time.

While we are on the colour pink then what about a Pink Mallow also known as the Sandrose!

This certainly is the time of the year we have the time to appreciate our gardens.

Absorb it all and get ideas of what you would like to have in the garden but most importantly keep in mind that you are an integral part of your gardens future.

Enjoy your day and see you next week.