

FMR January 15

Good Morning everyone, we are two weeks into the year and all is smooth. Exciting for many is the bird activity all over the city.

I am not referring to the Egyptian Geese that park on your chimney, but more so the amazing calls, tweets and constant chirping that starts early and goes on all day.

I know, not all of us hear it above the constant city drone but take a minute in the early morning or evening to appreciate the beautiful 'organized and melodious, noise' of nature.

Which brings me to the question...why do White eyes love lemon trees?

Well they certainly don't eat lemons so what is the attraction?

Most, but not all lemon trees and general citrus land up with a pest problem.

It could be scale, woolly aphids or any other aphid for that matter.

An indication of their presence is usually a lot of ants running up and down the stem and branches but then you might find a few friendly bees in on the action as well!!

Lets start at the very beginning.

Citrus seems rather susceptible to a few pests but the reasons are quite simple.

Your tree needs a well-drained, sunny position and a good supply of nutrients from the soil.

If these requirements are not there then the tree will be weak and open to a foreign invasion, and what better than to attack a weak specimen!!

The sucking insects like scale and aphids excrete a sweet substance we call honeydew which the ants use so in their interest they protect the insects that produce this delicacy.

Nevertheless, bees are also interested in the sticky honeydew but the primary cleaner is without doubt the horde of white eyes that visit the lemon tree everyday.

These little hyper active, jittering, twitching, non-blinking, restless and seemingly busy little creatures are without question the controllers of aphids, no matter what form they come in.

Just take a minute to watch them, they work in a team and move from one plant to the next, chatting away all the time but never stopping for a second.

What a gift....been able to talk and work at the same time.

I often wonder how they settle down to sleep at night without a calming agent

We must become more aware of the importance of bird and insect activity in the garden before getting excited about a few caterpillars, beetles and aphids!!!

If the woolly aphid infestation is out of hand, get the pressure sprayer out and give it a wash down with water.

You can of course use the pressure sprayer for most other troublesome goggas like red spider, caterpillars and scale, be they chewing or sucking critters.

It knocks them to the ground, exposing them to other predators or just upsets them so they don't settle in and start a colony!!

Before your busy day begins I would like to suggest two trees that have practical applications and do well in most areas around the peninsula.

The first is *Rapanea melanophloeos*, the Cape Beech or Boekenhout.

A very hardy tree that will tolerate coastal conditions and when settled is waterwise and undemanding.

It is quite widespread and common in our mountain forests but I see many a good specimen in local gardens where they receive protection from strong wind and therefore grow well.

Given space they are handsome evergreen trees providing shade and food for birds and insects.

My other suggestion is *Brachyleana discolor*, The Coastal Silver Oak, not from the peninsula and found from the Eastern Cape and northwards up the coast but nevertheless very happy here under all conditions and widely used.

It is probably used more as a hedge plant but it does make an interesting well branched, small bushy tree in the garden.

It takes anything you throw at it from sandy soil to salty wind but also thrives in suburbia away from the direct influence of the coast!

The flowers are small insignificant daisies, but its feature are the silver leaves which are a nice contrast.

Even in very sandy soils they thrive without much more than a dash of compost at planting and once established need very little water,

I would say a very rewarding and practical plant for harsh conditions and neglected gardens (if there is such a thing!!)

The second half of January is a busy time for many with work issues, back to school and thankfully we can start shopping again. Haha!!

It is a great time to leave our gardens to get on with it and take back their independence, go wild and be natural again.....so let them get on with it.