

January 22

We are all back to work and school to earn and learn.

2022 sounds good! We are 3 weeks into it whatever good we intend doing lets renew our promise to actively partner our environment through our gardens.

I was under the impression that we were all much too busy to look at doing anything in the garden this month and prepared to let it just go wild.!

I imagined that we were going to start the year off slowly and quietly in our gardens.

I was wrong as I see even more of a frenzy out there- mowers, blowers, brooms, weed eaters and chain saws are going at full tilt.

You've guessed ... I am going to talk about this thing called maintenance.

So why do we have to maintain plants?

I think the first reason is that plants must conform to our specifications and needs.

They must be the right size and stay that way even if they are living and growing all the time.

They must always look at 'our' best, healthy, shiny, dust free, flowering or fruiting on time, and most importantly no other insect, animal or living organism is allowed to be on or near them....because we own them!!

This is a very tall order, so we must feed, prune, doctor and engineer them in accordance with our needs, not their needs!!

So we really need to fully familiarize ourselves with the plant in question before we plant it. Its origin, where it grows naturally, how big it grows, what soil type it prefers and where it would like to spend the rest of its life....when you know this you can choose the best plant for the job.

If it's just a pretty ornament you are looking for to complete the garden tea setting then expect it to do its thing in the long term. It won't stay the same!!

So the bottom line is, very little maintenance is needed if you have the right plant.

I know we don't live in a perfect world, but you can reduce a lot of garden worry by just getting it right first time round.

Deep down the human spirit dictates that we must above all else move closer to earth and its resources we have taken for granted since time began.

Everything is less...air, water, fish, fossil fuels, plants and soil, except us, we just growing and growing and the need for more is outstripping the rest.

For many its all about more, bigger gas guzzlers, gold, diamonds and other things which are in effect not essential to a happy life.

We desperately need to focus on the living things so why not start in the garden.

We can make a positive contribution just in our little space.

We could start with our very own Jasmines especially *Jasminum multipartitum* which is very useful both as a shrub and a climber.

The dark, glossy green leaves are the perfect backdrop to the pink flower buds which open white and are highly scented.

They don't become invasive like the common scented Jasmine *polyanthum* and once established are easy to maintain and therefore perfect for wall trellises.

Its hardy, waterwise and sturdy so can be used, anywhere anytime, even as a potted specimen which can be trained as a topiary if you so inclined!!

Actually it made the best small hedge I have ever seen in a formal garden as it required less clipping than most other small hedge plants.

You've all heard the expression....Its as common as!!

You could instead say... Its common as Cape Myrtle, and not be too far off the mark.

The Cape Myrtle (not really a myrtle), better known as African Boxwood is found in southern and eastern Africa, it somehow swam to the Azores and to top it all is even found in China and the Himalayas!

I also learnt from a learned colleague that it belongs to the Primula family!

So its common, but does a proper job in many gardens around the world .

It grows in sun or semi-shade, out there in amongst fynbos or even on the forest floor.

You also find it on craggy mountain slopes and a bonus for all South Africans is that it is very happy in summer and winter rainfall areas.

Ok so what does this plant do when it's at home?

Birds love the fruit and help tremendously in keeping it plentiful.

It is also one of the most hardy and adaptable hedge plants around!!

A similar plant often confused with Myrsine is Morella cordifolia- The Waxberry.

They grow under the same conditions but Morella is happier on coastal sands all the way from the West Coast as far as the Eastern Cape.

So my all rounder of the week is without doubt the Cape Myrtle aka African Boxwood.

Give it a bash and let me know how it works for you.