

FMR September 14, 2019

If you missed About Week last week, then don't despair as every day of the year is Arbor Day.

There are many special trees for Cape gardens that I feel should be used a lot more as they are the most productive in our environment.

Maybe we should be looking a bit closer at the lesser known trees that play a big role in our environment.

Take *Olea capensis* the Ironwood which is found in and near our local forests.

One of the nicest specimens I have seen is in Kirstenbosch it's an absolute sight when in flower which is normally about December but can be earlier or later.

They are relatively slow growers so a good tree for future generations, but I must add that in a garden with a bit of care they do tend to grow faster.

The scented white flowers bring a variety of pollinators and the fruit is a great favourite of the Rameron Pidgeon and other larger fruit eaters plus Guinea fowl when they fall ripened to the floor.

Besides all the wildlife activity around it...it is a very garden friendly plant from a human point of view.

It takes a bit time to grow but in the end makes for a truly beautiful shade tree which will become a dominant feature!

It doesn't get too big in the average city garden when compared to its forest relatives which can get upwards of 15m.

There are many sub species in SA but those found in the W cape are usually a bit smaller.

It's probably not a good idea to plant in a very windy and exposed position but it will tolerate a fair amount of shade when young.

It prefers fairly rich soil so don't be shy on the compost when preparing the hole.

The other local tree I suggest you go out and find is *Canthium inerme* also known as the Bokdrol..the more correct, calling it the Turkey Berry!!

Because it comes from a range of habitats it is suited to garden cultivation.

It is classed more as a small evergreen and once established does not require much attention.

The flowers and fruit attract many insects and birds.

When planting don't be shy with the compost as it will respond well in a rich soil.

I love the light green smooth shiny leaves and feel it should be used a lot more in our gardens

Now is a good time to have a close look at bare patches that have developed in the lawn during winter due to shade

This is probably due to the long winter shadows resulting in a bit of dieback. Keep in mind that lawn grass needs sun and these patches will probably never come back to the same quality as the sunny areas.

Consider either removing the grass and creating a bed or just mulching with coarse material. If you haven't done it already maybe just cut the lawn low. After a light feeding combined with more sunlight it will be encouraged to spread and fill the gaps.

As spring is upon us most keen gardeners are thinking fertilizer!!

If our gardens are regularly mulched and composted we probably won't need much in the way of additional food but let's run over some basics.

Chemical fertilizers, especially those high in nitrates are over used with negative results such as burning, fast weak growth and soil becoming too acidic. Besides that they need a lot of water to work well.

We blame the soil for poor results but think before going out there and throwing a lot of fertilizer about.

Chemical fertilizers do supply a range of nutrients and elements but one thing they don't do is improve soil structure and health.

This is supplied by organic material which promotes living organisms and in turn produces the necessary processes for plant growth.

Today we have many organic fertilizers available and are the preferred choice of many and generally have the same chemical make up as their counterparts.

The benefit is that they are less concentrated, have less chance of burning roots and stems, break down slower and improve soil structure.

I suppose you need less expertise to apply them.

Like any other fertilizer they will need to be watered in but the organic material that remains on the surface will act as a fine mulch before it too breaks down and moves into the soil.

We should nevertheless be thinking about reducing our lawn coverage especially if we don't use our grassed areas.

Create more beds for good plants.

Did you know that lawn maintenance is the most costly factor in the garden? far surpassing that of the other planted areas in the garden.

If you have a local wild garden then very little is required to keep it perfect.

An old saying...if your garden needs nothing...don't give it anything!!

I do believe it refers to us as well

From me Happy times and Good bye'