

FMR September 21, 2019

Indigenous Alternatives

Good morning! After spending time in the nursery, I ask myself, are we in a rut when it comes to choosing plants or are we just been ill advised by parrot horticulturists and sales people who say the same thing, day in...day out.

I'm not sure whether its fashion or ignorance, no matter what, we need to change our buying habits when it comes to plants.

Do we have to always buy the same old plants that have been used time and time again?

Is it because we see them growing successfully or are they the only ones continually recommended?

Why don't we think about change "for a change", take off the blinkers, open the mind, and use other plants which do the same or better job.

I visited a most beautiful home a while back. Unusual architecture dominated with natural elements and a well-designed garden.

The garden was 90% local plants but guess what had been planted to screen the neighbours? A Leylandii hedge!!! Very disappointing!

Of all the hundreds of suitable local plants to choose from, the landscape designer had to use an unsuitable conifer to do the job.

Was it necessary to create an 8-10 metre high mono culture feature, an environmentally unfriendly eyesore that has been outlawed in many countries, to totally obliterate the neighbour?

The mass use of single species shows a lack of plant knowledge and a good example of 'in the rut trendy planting'!!

A practical alternative would be an informal mix of local plants that would have attracted wildlife and been maintenance free.

I suggest a mix of the following...or

Diospyros whyteana- the Bladder nut, Buddleja auriculata- Weeping Sage, Dovyalis caffra – The Kei apple, pop in some Polygala myrtifolia- the Blou Kappie, a few Honeybell bushes and the sweet pea bush Podalyria calyptrata....its as easy as that.

If you are getting a designer or contractor in to do your garden landscaping then ask questions, look at alternatives and get references. A wise move is to get in an independent horticulturist or landscape consultant who can advise you on plant material, environmental considerations and correct procedures before you commit to appointing anyone.

Rather spend a little on getting professional advice before landing up with a very costly mistake in the future.

It's not too late (if you can still find them) to pop in some summer flowering bulbs like Amaryllis, Dahlias, Tuberous Begonia, which make for a showy feature. Gladioli are many and not to forget the sought after Tuberose with its intoxicating scent.

An unusual plant which I find makes for a good eyecatcher is the Pineapple Lily, *Eucomis autumnalis*, which will flower in autumn.

Last but not least are the bulbous Arum lilies or Calla lilies which have great appeal.

They come in yellow pink and shades thereof and are most sought after.

In the end....There is the perfect plant out there for you and your garden!

Most of these bulbs can be found as growing container plants in the nursery this time of the year. Don't give up the hunt!!

A little chore you can do now is have a close look at your citrus trees.

They are probably still bearing, but as soon as the big crop is over start removing all dead and diseased wood plus those little superfluous twigs and small branches that are non-productive.

With the lowlight intensity during winter you need to open them up for more light and air circulation.

Winter rain, poor light and badly drained soil will promote scale and aphid activity which also results in black sooty mould...so now is the time to clean them up and if need be, a dose of balanced fertilizer or foliar feed to keep them strong.

I find a good wash off with a pressure sprayer does the job.

If your deciduous fruit trees like peaches are in bud or flower and you forgot to prune, then it's never too late.

Don't start cutting back summer flowering ornamentals, wait for them to flower and then prune.

A reminder...the Posberg Flower reserve closes end of the month so make plans to get there soon, otherwise wait another year.

For enquiries please phone the reserve directly on 022 7722144

It's always a good idea to phone in advance to check on flower activity, how busy it is and the best time to go. Do it soon.

Let's just go back to basics when selecting plant material and think of suitability and practicality. Lets not dally about...see you next week!!